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ABSTRACT

The relationship between learning and continuity and change in adult life was explored in a study involving 140 in-depth biographical interviews of adult learners in 3 different areas of England and case studies of 6 adult learners. The study methodology was based on a triangular conceptualization according to which personal identity, human capital, and social capital constitute the apices of a triangle encompassing 12 categories of benefits derived from learning. The study established that initial education has a variety of effects beyond the crucial effects on subsequent life changes and earnings that have been well documented elsewhere. Education was shown to provide structure to people's lives and the confidence, skills, and opportunity to access knowledge relevant to new situations. Family members' participation in learning benefitted the rest of their families in numerous ways. Little evidence of education directly improving physical health was found; however, participation in education promoted civic activity and development of social capital and social cohesion. Policymakers were advised to give greater recognition to the sustaining effect of education on personal lives and the social fabric and to the benefits of family learning programs and nonaccredited and local courses. Information about respondents' background characteristics and the interview topic guides are appended. (Contains 23 references.) (MN)

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ED 468 442

WIDER BENEFITS OF LEARNING RESEARCH REPORT NO.3

Learning, Continuity and Change in Adult Life

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Centre for Research
on the Wider
Benefits of Learning

LEARNING, CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN ADULT LIFE

Tom Schuller, Angela Brassett-Grundy, Andy Green, Cathie Hammond and John Preston

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Conceptual and methodological

1. Our first piece of original fieldwork within the Centre has been deliberately broad-ranging. We are not aware of other work that has focused on such a diverse group of learners and such a diverse spread of learning effects. The first outcome from our work is the development of a framework within which such research can be carried out – the triangle depicted on page 10. We stress that it is not comprehensive; rather it offers a conceptual baseline for future work, by ourselves and others.

2. Our approach was biographical, allowing respondents to trace the trajectories of their learning back to their early schooling and to range widely over their learning experiences. It shows how complex the interactions of learning and life are. This is not the usual academics' caution, since as policy-oriented researchers we accept the obligation to come to conclusions. But it strikingly complements findings from quantitative work that might at first be expected to produce much 'tighter' results, yet in fact similarly illustrate the difficulty of identifying clear and simple causal effects of learning (Behrman & Stacey, 1997).

3. In addition to the conceptual triangle, we put forward a simple matrix to capture the effects of learning, with two dimensions: from individual to collective; and from sustaining to transforming. *A very general but crucial conclusion is that the sustaining effect of education is pervasive, operates at many different levels and is critical to the lives of countless individuals and communities.* It is the transformational effects that often tend to be highlighted, quite reasonably, since they are more readily visible. But our study reveals many of the ways in which education underpins the maintenance of personal well-being and social cohesion. It prevents or inhibits decline and, more positively, reinforces on a continuing and usually unspectacular basis the health of individuals or communities, to an extent that is largely unrecognised or at least left deeply implicit.

Initial education

4. Initial education has a variety of effects, beyond the crucial effects on subsequent life chances and earnings well documented elsewhere. We find a rather weaker than might be expected relationship between success at school and enjoyment, with several instances of people enjoying school in spite of gaining no qualifications, and conversely of people achieving well but leaving with a distaste for education. This may have implications for policies relating to widening participation: one could predict an increase in the numbers of those we call 'trudgers', who acquire qualifications but no enthusiasm for learning.

5. Our respondents refer in many different ways to the importance of school as a place where habits of respect are (or are not) developed, between students and teachers and amongst students. Positive remarks were much more likely to be found amongst respondents schooled in other countries, illuminating differences in cultural attitudes and practice.

6. Crucially significant is the role of initial education in developing good communicative skills, so that young people have both the confidence and the skills to make themselves properly understood, and to understand others.

7. One encouraging finding is the way that people tend to remember and cherish a good teacher, even when they may not have been successful generally at school or even in the subject taught by that person. This 'sleeper' effect reinforces the importance of good teaching even where the outcomes are not immediate.

8. The lack of guidance offered emerges strongly. This is age-related, in that proper guidance systems have only developed relatively recently. The difficulty of delivering effective student-centred guidance is evident, given people's diverse personalities and their natural uncertainties as young persons.

Adaptation and change

One of our projects focused on parents with young children, and how learning helped them to manage the changes brought about by parenthood. We also include findings from the other project (concerning social cohesion), that relate to this theme.

9. A major benefit to parents, especially to mothers, of taking part in education is that it provides them with a change of scene, routine and company. It enables, or pushes, them to get away from the home and their children for a while, and to maintain or recover their sense of identity as an adult. The strength of the effect ranges from a mild benefit to a sense that their participation saved them from severe mental health problems.

10. Education provides a structure to people's lives. This may be on a daily/weekly basis, where otherwise they felt they were losing control; or in the sense of giving them a focus and goal, long- or short-term, such that they could see a way to progress beyond the current phase of their lives. This was most strongly expressed by mothers of small children.

11. Education provides the confidence, skills and opportunity to access knowledge relevant to new situations occasioned by parenting. This is obvious where it refers to specific parenting courses or other similar learning. But education also provides people with the ability to draw on knowledge sources, notably books; and gives them the opportunity to do so by furnishing access to libraries. These

are particularly important where parents face the challenges of single parenthood or sick children.

12. English language training is crucial to parents who do not speak English, to enable them to understand the educational and health needs of their children and to enable them to access successfully the appropriate services.

13. Overall, learning of all kinds enables parents to retain their sense of being part of a wider, adult society, to contribute to it and to access support from it.

Family lives

We identify a number of ways in which family members participating in learning benefits the rest of the family.

14. Taking part themselves in learning strengthens the general value parents place on their own children's learning. We could not from our study identify how this actually enhanced the children's achievement levels, but it may be assumed to have done so in many cases.

15. Parents come to understand more of specific aspects of their children's schooling, for example the curriculum in maths, English or computing/IT, and can offer direct support.

16. Parents may learn skills directly enabling them to improve their parenting, for example in devising games with their children or understanding their developmental patterns better, and managing their behaviour more effectively. They also develop better communication skills generally.

17. Learning may improve relationships between partners, or between adults and their parents or the wider family. This may be by providing common subjects of interest around which communication can improve; but more generally it is likely to be because of enhanced respect and self-confidence.

18. There can be negative or double-edged effects. For example, a parent's participation in education may reduce the time and energy they have available for their family, or raised aspirations may cause them to give up serving other members of the family.

Health

We found little evidence of education directly improving physical health. The exceptions were some older people. However, mental health effects of various kinds were very clear.

19. Education can help directly as a therapeutic activity for people with mental health problems.

20. More commonly reported was the preventative effect, where respondents talked about how education had helped them avoid, minimise or address depression. This outcome is a major component of what we have termed the sustaining effect of education. Much of it relates to benefits that stop short of the medical, but that have significant implications for the interrelationships between education, health and community policies.

21. Learning helps people communicate more effectively with professionals, either directly, by understanding the language or indirectly, by having the confidence to express themselves and ask questions. It widens access to written information on health issues. In addition, classes provide a forum for the formal and informal exchange of health-related information.

22. Education can increase self-awareness and self-understanding. In general the effect is positive, enhancing people's sense of autonomy and efficacy, with further positive consequences. But it can be risky for the individual and their family, putting in question fundamental issues of personal identity.

23. Many of the other reported effects contribute to people's sense of well-being, and thereby to their good health. There are also negative effects, for example from stress related to the demands of studying.

Social capital and social cohesion

24. Different competences emerged as a result of learning which promote civic activity: 'metacompetences', which signal a holistic understanding of the place of civic engagement; generic skills that could be put to good civic use; and basic competences necessary for anyone to fulfil minimum citizenship requirements.

25. We identified various mechanisms through which tolerance and positive learning about social values take place: social mix (the sheer fact of meeting people from other social groups and backgrounds); role models provided by teachers and other students; and subject content providing better understanding.

26. Participation in education also provides the physical opportunities through which people can put their civic skills to use. This may be related to the school or college, or to wider community issues.

27. A further benefit is a strengthening of social networks. We identify three ways in which this occurs: individuals' entry into new networks; the extension of existing networks; and the restoration of networks that had in some way lapsed or declined.

28. We found striking examples of civic activity relating to particular life cycle stages. In addition to the targeted population of parents of young children, older people's contribution to such activity is strongly aided by learning. The gendering of civic activity reinforces the need to recognise informal as well as formal types.

Policy implications

This fieldwork cannot provide precise estimates of the outcomes of learning. But it can supply definite pointers and policy implications.

29. The *sustaining effect* of education on personal lives and the social fabric demands much fuller recognition. Education transforms people's lives, but it also, less spectacularly, enables them to cope with the multifarious stresses of daily life as well as continuous and discontinuous social change; and to contribute to others' well-being by maintaining community and collective life. This sustaining effect is particularly significant in underpinning rationales for more intersectoral policy-making, especially between education and health.

30. Learning is of fundamental importance in sustaining and improving *communication* at every level and in every form, from basic and linguistic to advanced and social. Policies and provision should address the development of appropriate and effective communication competences in many different contexts: within schools and colleges; between professionals and consumers in the public services; within families; between different age groups. Provision here refers not only to courses and formal learning opportunities, but to the physical structures and social contexts within which communication takes place.

31. One specific aspect of communication is the importance of ESOL. *Knowing English* is fundamental to the social integration of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, and can transform their lives.

32. Communication and community are obviously linked. Colleges and other educational institutions are places where people can feel part of a community, participating in a learning culture. This includes those who have been on the margins. The institutions need support in developing this function, in the mission they have and the facilities they provide. *Improving the design and quality of education's physical environment* should be a high priority.

33. Good teaching matters, though its effect may not show up until much later. Teachers at all levels need support in sustaining learning cultures within different student peer groups. Central to this is *adequate time for teachers to do the appropriate job*, especially in relation to learners at the foot of the ladder, who require close personal support.

34. *Guidance* for young people, e.g. through Connexions, should stress that even if they choose not to continue directly with their education they should always be conscious that there are opportunities to return to learning.

35. Education can have a large effect on *ill health*, especially mental health. Initiatives such as Prescriptions for Learning point the way to creative collaboration between education and health services. In addition to specific measures designed to improve ill health, education has a major sustaining or *preventative role*, which deserves far greater support.

36. There is much scope for exploring cost-effective learning-based provision with positive health impacts. This may *require new or refined methodologies to compare the impact of learning on health* with that of clinical or other professional health services.

37. *Family learning* involves more than generating parental involvement in their children's education, though this is a central element. Many different sets of relationships are potentially affected, within and across generations; in every case, learning can play a significant role in sustaining and strengthening these relationships, notably by improving communication skills and mutual respect. More support for initiatives and policies that promote family members learning together in a variety of ways will have multiple benefits for educational achievement and more widely for family relationships.

38. The virtuous cycle of *learning and volunteering* can be fostered in a number of ways. Certain stages in the life cycle are particular appropriate for offering opportunities for people to engage in voluntary activity: for example, parents of young children through their primary school, especially in relation to school-related roles such as classroom assistant; or older people preparing for retirement and after retirement. Retirees are a vast, largely untapped resource for civic roles and responsibilities, and learning can be the trigger to mobilise them.

39. The dynamic of participation in civic or community activity means that it generates further learning needs; it also offers people the opportunity to gain skills and confidence, which can open up other avenues. Community development and neighbourhood renewal *initiatives could include clear links to educational progression* routes.

40. Our findings confirm the well-known importance of *non-accredited and local* courses as often the first route for those with low confidence, whether or not they have been successful in initial education.

41. Access to *computer skills* is an excellent way of encouraging people from very varied backgrounds to take part in organised learning. Often the outcomes go

well beyond the individual skills, and involve unforeseen personal and social benefits.

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PART A: Structure of the research

1. Introduction

This report presents findings from a major piece of primary fieldwork carried out by the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning. The WBL Centre was set up by the DfES in 1999 with the following brief:

i) produce and apply methods for measuring and analysing the contribution that learning makes to wider goals including (but not limited to) social cohesion, active citizenship, active ageing and improved health;

ii) devise and apply improved methods for measuring the value and contribution of forms of learning including (but not limited to) community-based adult learning where the outcomes are not necessarily standard ones such as qualifications;

iii) develop an overall framework to evaluate the impact of the lifelong learning strategy being put in place to 2002 and beyond to realise the vision set out in the former DfEE's Green Paper 'the Learning Age' (CM 3790) February 1998, covering both economic and non-economic outcomes.

The Centre's first phase involved preliminary scoping work and literature reviews covering these broad fields (Schuller et al., 2001; Plewis & Preston, 2001), together with associated analyses of particular aspects (Bynner & Egerton, 2001; Preston & Hammond, 2002). Readers are referred to these publications for analysis of relevant literature, which is not included here.

The second phase comprised the fieldwork presented below, and linked work on large-scale data-sets (Feinstein, 2002 a and b; Blackwell & Bynner, 2002). This report aims to:

i) present a set of *benefit typologies*, derived from our extensive fieldwork in Camden, Nottingham and Tendring. These offer a framework for future work, within the WBLC and elsewhere;

ii) present *evidence* from the fieldwork, both thematically and by selecting a small number of individual case studies to illustrate the interactive effects of learning;

iii) suggest a number of *policy implications*. We are naturally cautious about making strong policy recommendations on the basis of this evidence alone, but there are some clear implications for discussion.

We have used the National Adult Learning Survey definitions of learning, which include taught and non-taught categories (see Appendix 3). In this report we use a number of terms – 'learning' and 'education' primarily, but also 'study', 'classes' and 'courses' – when discussing people's learning experiences; at this point it is important only to stress that the research included a wide range of experiences, and explored to some extent their relative significance.

The report is structured as follows. After a brief introduction we present the framework we have developed for analysing our data, and then summary typologies of learning effects and of causal relationships. Part B contains thematic analyses of the data. We begin with results that relate to people's initial schooling and the contexts of their subsequent learning. We then deal in successive sections (6–9) with the effects of learning on parental adaptation, health, family lives and social capital. Part C addresses the data from a different angle in order to give a more holistic interpretation that stresses the interactions between the different effects – already evident but implicit in the previous sections. Sections 10 and 11 present a number of different individual biographical accounts. Each is accompanied by a diagram of the individual's educational 'career' and its effects of their lives. Part D concludes with policy implications.

1.1 Sample and approach

The fieldwork comprised two projects, originally conceived of as distinct: on Learning and Social Cohesion, and on Learning and the Management of Lifecourse Transitions. Over 140 interviewees were drawn from the same three geographical areas, chosen for their diversity: Camden in North London, an inner-city area of high ethnic diversity; Tendring in Essex, a semi-rural area with a mainly white population of below average income; and Nottinghamshire, a county that combines urban and rural, with a spread of socio-economic lifestyles.

Selection of interviewees for both projects was based on purposive sampling, drawing on people involved in a range of different learning contexts, from informal community settings to higher education. The interviewees comprised learners drawn from a variety of contexts, spanning formal and community-based settings and almost the full range of levels. They split roughly 2:1 female:male; cover all ages from 16 to over 70; and are from a range of different ethnic backgrounds. Appendix 1 contains details of the respondents' socio-economic profile.

The decision to use the same areas was deliberate, since we foresaw that there would be a good deal of overlap between the two projects. The methodology used, in-depth interviews with a clear topic guide, was common to both, with sections of the interviews common to both projects. The overlap indeed materialised, with data gathered in each that are highly relevant to the other. People interviewed on the social cohesion project had things to say about managing change in response to having children, and those on the transitions project often talked about their participation in civic and voluntary activities, a principal theme of the social cohesion project. More generally, both sets of respondents had things to say about the effects of learning on their psychological health and family lives.

The transitions project was initially designed to focus on the changes in people's lives occasioned by the entry of their children into the formal school system. However it soon became apparent from our pilot work that the changes involved and the pathways into work, education or other activity were too diverse for the notion of a single 'transition' to be sustained. We therefore recast this particular project somewhat more broadly, in terms of adaptation and change. (This has not deterred us from seeing it as the basis for future work on more clearly defined transitions – recognising that it may well be part of a broader overall trend towards greater ambiguity and blurring in life course transitions.[1]) The project involved interviews with parents whose youngest child is between five and eight years old (in some cases slightly older). The rationale for this sampling is that they were able to talk about the changes that occurred when they no longer had a child below school age in the household. The parents were identified through a variety of means, using both formal educational institutions and informal initiatives.

Our topic guides contained a number of key prompts encouraging respondents to range widely over their life stories, beginning with their experience of school. The interviews were recorded, and lasted between 45 minutes and over two hours. We have analysed each transcript by focusing initially on the primary outcome fields identified in the triangle set out in Figure 1 (see p. 10); and then on other outcomes emerging from the account. Transcripts were then read by a second researcher to confirm, supplement or revise the first interpretation.

1.2 The nature of the evidence

We set out to reveal and explore causal links between learning of different kinds and its effects. Tracing exact causality is predictably difficult. There are many instances where a single learning episode is reported by the respondent as having led *directly* to a specific outcome, in terms of changed behaviour, values or situation. Even there we need to distinguish between sole and joint causality. *Sole causality* refers to instances where it is education alone that has brought about the outcome, *joint causality* to where it is education in interaction with other elements, such as religion or family upbringing. (Of course, 'sole' causality is never pure, since individuals are already the product of an ongoing mix of upbringing, social context and personal characteristic.)

Indirect effects can also be broken down into different categories. On the one hand there are effects that are indirect because they occur *at one or more remove* down the causal chain. They may or may not derive from another direct benefit. The sequence is often not a tidy linear one. On the other hand there are effects that are indirect, in that they impact on broader social relations, for instance in improving general levels of trust or communication.

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[1] The latest National Adult Learning Survey (2001) reports very little apparent connection between specified life events and participation in adult learning but observes that this may be because of the data collected (La Valle & Blake, 2001).

The notion of a 'causal chain' is only one available metaphor. As our individual case studies show, the links between learning and its effects are complex and overlapping. The chains are therefore often not linear, so we need to think in terms of a web as well as a chain, or some fusion of the two images.

What is the nature or standing of our findings? The evidence we present here is not from a representative sample of the population as a whole, or indeed of any particular sub-populations. The findings map out the diversity of learning's wider benefits, and how these come about through different learning experiences, for individuals with diverse personal biographies. But they cannot be generalised in any statistical sense. In particular, it is important to stress the obvious point that we spoke to people who had engaged in some kind of recognisable learning, in order to identify the benefits of learning. The results cannot therefore be assumed to apply to those who are not involved in learning, so that even if they were attracted into education the results for them might be very different (for the purposes of this methodological point we speak here as if there are two basic categories, of those who are and those who are not involved). There is a selection bias of a kind, but not one that undermines the validity of our findings.

Our respondents were made aware of the fact that we were interested in the benefits of learning, and indeed came from a research centre carrying that name. They may therefore have conscientiously delved particularly deeply to dredge up possible benefits, producing a 'rosier' picture for us than might otherwise have emerged. We did encourage them to consider other influences on their development, for example parental, and it was fairly common for them to attribute things they had learnt to such non-educational social or environmental factors.

In short, we are reporting on the benefits of learning as expressed to us by our selected respondents. We have interpreted what they said, using a set of established social science categories some of which we developed for the purpose. The interpretations are being offered to policy-makers, to researchers and to practitioners; we expect each of these communities to react with somewhat different questions about the nature of the evidence, and for this to take the debate on a further stage in each case.

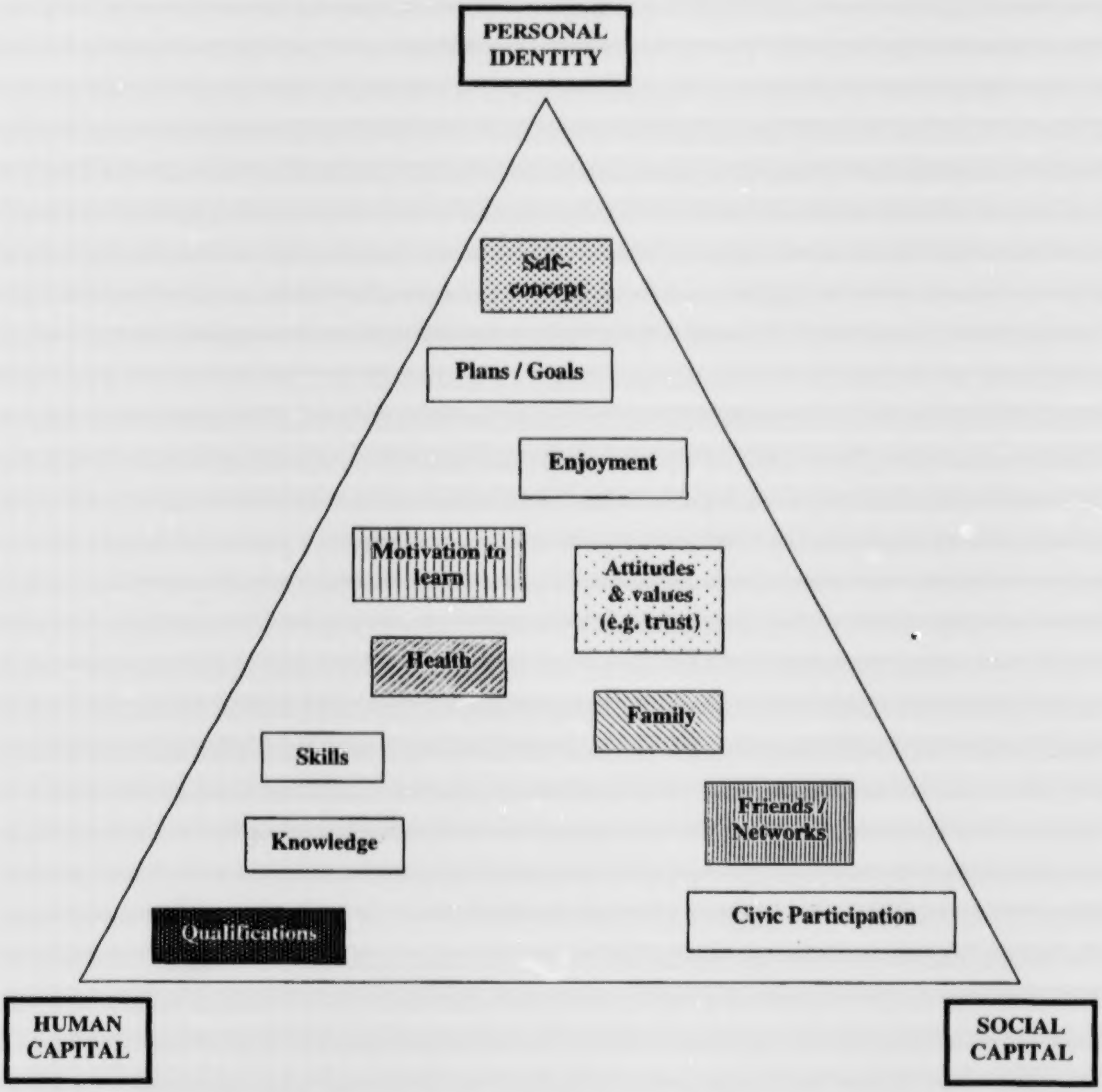
2. A triangular framework for analysis

Figure 1 on page 10 sets out the framework we have begun to use in analysing the outcomes of the fieldwork. The triangle is constructed around the three poles of human capital, social capital and personal identity. The sides of the triangle therefore approximate to the socio-economic, the socio-psychological and the psycho-economic.

Human capital requires little elaboration, being already a well-known concept (OECD, 1998). It refers to the knowledge, skills and qualifications that individuals acquire as a consequence of organised learning. These are the most obvious outcomes of learning – even though the measurement of skills and knowledge is not straightforward (see for example Eraut, 2000, on tacit knowledge). Human capital theory was developed mainly in an economic context, to explain why individuals or groups of individuals (up to the level of nation) vary in income, productivity or career chances. But it has also been used to include characteristics such as health – both, it is worth noting, as a component of human capital and as an outcome. We are interested in how far the acquisition of knowledge, skills and qualifications leads to other outcomes, but also whether it leads to further learning.

Social capital is a relative newcomer to social sciences, but has developed real impetus in recent months as a concept of major potential policy significance (e.g. see ONS, 2001). It refers to the norms and networks that bring people together to mutual advantage (Putnam, 2000; Baron et al., 2000). Unlike human capital it is not, or not only, a personal attribute or asset, but refers to the relationships that exist between individuals or groups of individuals. It is most commonly operationalised by reference to attitudinal measures, e.g. of expressed trust, or, more substantively, to behavioural ones such as levels of participation in civic activities. It is the latter set that is more central to our use of the concept, so we are exploring what the mechanisms are that underpin the association between levels of education and participation in most forms of civic activity; but we are also interested in the way learning affects the extent to which people show tolerance and other characteristics that bind social units together.

Figure 1: Triangular conceptualisation of the social benefits of learning


PERSONAL IDENTITY
Self-concept
Plans / Goals
Enjoyment
Motivation to learn
Attitudes & values (e.g. trust)
Health
Family
Skills
Friends / Networks
Knowledge
Civic Participation
Qualifications
HUMAN CAPITAL
SOCIAL CAPITAL

There are strong connections between human and social capital, so strong indeed that some critics of social capital argue that it adds nothing to our analytical capacity that human capital does not already supply. (Other critics, by contrast, argue that the notion of cultural capital as developed by Bourdieu and others has a more incisive analytical edge.) Once again, social capital figures in the literature both as an input and an output, attracting the criticism that it is inherently circular. However, we already have to deal with the ambiguity between intermediate and final outcomes, so we do not see this as an insurmountable problem.[2]

Personal identity refers to the characteristics of the individual that define his or her outlook and self-image. It includes specific personality characteristics, such as ego strength, self-esteem, internal locus of control (see Cote, 1997, on identity capital).

The triangle is designed to recognise the fact that these three dimensions intersect, and that many of the outcomes are a combination of two or all three of the polar concepts. Thus health (physical or mental) may be affected by the skills a person is able to deploy, or by the sets of relationships in which they are involved and by their personal outlook on life and view of themselves; and all these factors interact.

Obviously the model is a simplification, in two senses. First, there are many more items that could be included in the triangle as actual or potential outcomes of learning. One example, which is relevant to our own possible programme of research but not included in the triangle as here presented, is criminal activity (or its converse, law-abiding behaviour), but there are many others. Another, difficult to capture but emerging strongly from our fieldwork, is the general socialising effect of education: the mere fact of bringing together people from different backgrounds serves to extend our general understanding of each other, whatever the actual content of the education. The model is therefore not comprehensive in its content, but is designed as a framework with potential for embracing most other issues.

Secondly, the model appears static. It presents the areas on which we are concentrating our analysis of the outcomes of learning in this particular programme of research. However these are not necessarily final outcomes. In some cases, and some contexts, they could be regarded as intermediate outcomes. For example, participation in civic activity may be seen as a good in itself, something that is regarded as a defining feature of a flourishing and healthy society. However it can also be regarded as a means to a further end, in the sense that civic engagement leads to greater social cohesion and more learning. In our view, it does not make sense to attempt to define a single linear sequence with discrete categories of intermediate and final outcomes that hold good in all circumstances. Items can and will be allocated to the intermediate or final category according to the particular focus of interest. So the model simplifies in being static as it is presented on the page.

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[2] The 2001 NALS survey reaches the following conclusion: "The hypothesis that an individual's level of social capital may relate to their participation in learning, independent of their other characteristics such as demographics, education and employment has been supported. However … .the ways in which indicators of social capital are related to other socio-demographic characteristics are complex, and do not conform to the simple patterns predicted by some of the literature on social capital." (La Valle & Blake, 2001; p. 96).

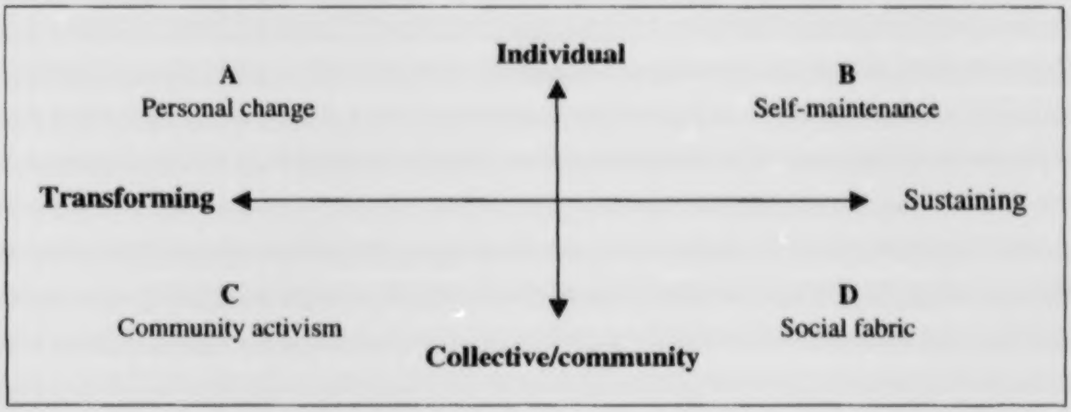
3. The effects of learning: general outcomes

3.1 Classifying effects

We begin with a simple matrix (see Figure 2 below). One dimension represents effects of learning running from those that pertain very much to the *individual* alone, to those that benefit the wider *community*. In many cases learning has both kinds of effect, but for the purposes of this exercise this is a useful distinction. The second dimension distinguishes learning that brings about *transformation* in people's lives from learning that enables individuals and communities to *sustain* what they are doing. The former type of effect is most commonly reported and celebrated, quite reasonably, for example in the accounts gathered across the country during Adult Learners Week (ALW). But we point to a very important conservation effect, where education prevents decay or collapse (at individual or community level), in addition to those instances where it brings about change of a more or less dramatic kind.

By definition the sustaining effect is less visible than the transforming. Indeed, it is from one angle always hypothetical, since it refers to the avoidance of a negative development that would otherwise have occurred, and is largely untestable in a strict positivist sense. A further difficulty is the time lag that is often involved: if education were not available, it would in most (but by no means all) cases be some time before the consequences were really felt, for example in terms of increased levels of depression and therefore pressure on mental health services. But we have no problem in including such benefits, and in attributing them to learning. We go further: this sustaining effect is a hugely important benefit of learning, which has gone largely unrecognised – partly because of the measurement problem, but also because of the taken-for-grantedness of learning. Any estimate of the benefits, or general effects, of learning should at least try to come to grips with the way it acts to sustain and nurture some of the most fundamental aspects of social life.

Figure 2: Matrix classifying the effects of learning



In the top left quadrant (A) come the effects which are familiar from ALW and other accounts (though none the less stirring for their familiarity), where individuals have changed their personal or professional lives by taking part in some form of adult learning.

In the top right quadrant (B) we locate the kinds of effect that contribute to the individual's ability to sustain him or herself in a reasonable state of well-being or health, physical or mental. We have many instances of individuals reporting to us that without their class they would have lapsed into depression; or were already somewhat depressed, as they now realise, but were first stopped from sliding further down and then had their mental health improved (shifting them towards the left in the matrix). But we refer here not only to the prevention of ill health but also to the maintenance to positive forms of well-being, where learning enables people to continue to live fulfilling and useful lives.

The more such an effect occurs amongst any given population, the more this benefit spans the vertical axis and takes us down into the third quadrant (C), as the sustaining effect on an individual contributes to the sustaining of a community's mental health. If we cannot speak exactly in those terms, i.e. of a community as such having levels of health, since communities are made up of individuals, we can certainly speak of a collective environment that is conducive to sustaining health. Sustaining the social fabric goes far beyond straight issues of health, obviously. It can refer, for example, to broad socialisation effects, as members of a community learn to understand each other's values and positions, and to communicate with each other. We cover some of this in discussing tolerance and values in Section 8.

The fourth quadrant (D) refers to cases where learning has enabled or stimulated social change. This may be through the agency of a single individual, or through collective learning. The action may be focused on a specific issue, such as the improvement of local schooling, or it may be more general. It is the transformation of the collective environment, or features of it, that counts here. Our evidence includes a variety of instances of activism, bearing in mind that the term 'community activist' has connotations that many of those whom we might place in this category for the purposes of this analysis would reject. We are dealing not only with people who think of themselves as activists but also those who are engaged in bringing about change but in a more gradualist, less publicly prominent way.

It is important to stress that both dimensions are continua; in a world of constant change it is not always obvious where sustaining stops and transformation begins. Moreover, individuals' learning cannot always be neatly located within the matrix, especially as the nature of their learning may change over time.

All the categories identified through this matrix can contain negative effects, though in some cases this is harder to imagine than others. Thus learning may unhealthily inhibit individuals from change, confirming them in their current roles. Or it may bring about social transformation, but of a kind that is damaging (quadrant 4) – there are in the broader literature examples of education's modernising role bringing severe costs to traditional communities. (For example, the idea of the first generation working-class student was seen as sometimes in conflict with traditional ties and affiliations in the family and outside.)

The family acts as a kind of junction point or switch in many instances. It is itself a major locus of learning, a mediator of its effects and a principal outcome variable. People are individually transformed as members of a family, or they may play a part in sustaining the social fabric through family involvement that has been significantly enhanced through learning. So the family, in whatever form, is often centrally present, but does not form part of the matrix.

This matrix is sufficiently broad and simple to act as a kind of umbrella within which our very diverse results can be located. We turn now to a brief overview of the kinds of causal relationship that map onto it.

3.2 Confidence

The most fundamental and pervasive benefit from learning of every kind is a growth in self-confidence. This is probably the most commonly reported effect from all relevant research, and our study confirms it. It is in one sense '*grindingly familiar*', as one of our collaborators once put it. The task here is to transcend that familiarity by distinguishing and illustrating the principal ways in which learning improves confidence, and how improved confidence together with other outcomes of learning lead to additional benefits so that policy implications can be derived.

Below is a schematic list of benefits flowing from greater self-confidence, ordered roughly in accordance with the matrix given above, i.e. running from individual to community levels. They refer to changes within individuals, but the benefits are often wider. Our respondents describe how, by enhancing their confidence, learning has enabled them:

Individual

↑

- to draw on and make sense of their own personal experience;
- to put forward their own views;
- to acknowledge mistakes;
- to confront problems rather than hide from them;
- to challenge the views of others;
- to ask for help;
- to accept the views of others even though these may differ from their own;
- to accept the views of others even though this entails them changing their own viewpoint;
- to put themselves in unfamiliar situations;

- to communicate more effectively with professionals, notably on health or education matters;
- to communicate more effectively within family or personal relationships;
- to make themselves available to others, e.g. as a problem-solving resource;
- actively to offer help to friends, neighbours or family;
- to perform more effectively in their different social roles, i.e. generally to raise their levels of social competence and contribution;
- to take on new roles and responsibilities in the family and community.

Collective

It is hard to think of a single field where confidence is not mentioned as a key benefit of learning. This list could be enormously elaborated. To take just one example, the quality of basic political life is enhanced by the ability of citizens not only to articulate their views and listen to those of others, but also to have the courage to acknowledge that it is possible for them to change their own views in response to the arguments of others.

We should also recognise that confidence is not only a benefit for those who have previously not been successful, in education or elsewhere. It is most common to find it reported as a gain by those who had never experienced success in the classroom and manage to overcome their inhibitions, often to a dramatic extent. But even those who have already achieved much can still have their confidence further boosted, to very positive effect. The case of Irene illustrates this strikingly; she was already a successful woman with a good career and a record of scholastic success (though no degree) when at the age of 50 she took part in a trauma course in the company of 23 highly qualified professionals. Outdoing them gave her enormous impetus, which has carried on into her retirement, enabling her to play a very active role at several levels in the community. So restoring or enhancing confidence is something that occurs at many levels, even if its effect is most obvious at the most basic level.

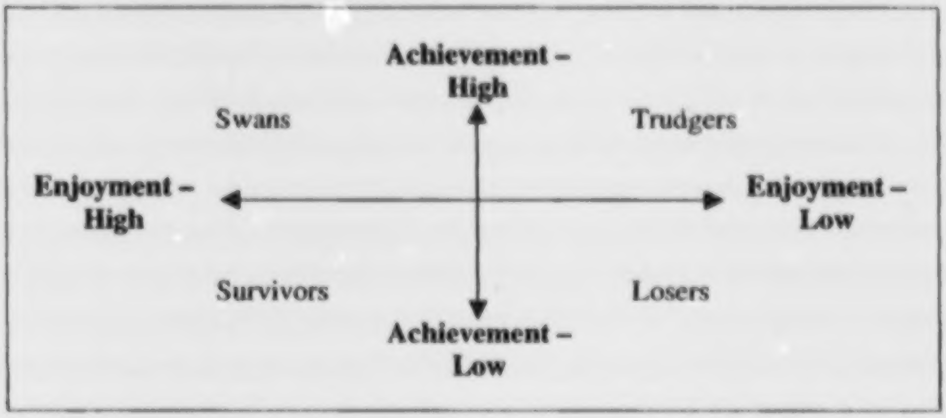
Learning about computers illustrates several of these points. Our evidence contains many examples of people learning IT skills, usually at quite basic levels. The learning has a direct effect in improving skill levels, and sometimes also qualifications. These may lead in turn to employment, or to access to information about employment; or, in a slightly more extended process, to the confidence that enables the learner to consider applying for a job. But in a striking number of cases the strongest effect of learning to handle a computer is to improve the learner's overall confidence, leading not to a job but to better family relationships, to greater willingness to engage socially or to better communication with professionals. It can be seen quite clearly as generating greater social inclusion at a number of levels concurrently.

4. School and initial education

It is a commonplace that people who do not succeed at school leave with little motivation to return. We had many accounts of people who had been badly treated at school, who left with little to show for it and who had had to overcome great hurdles to re-enter education. However the picture is naturally more complex. Many respondents also spoke of having enjoyed school in spite of having achieved no qualifications; conversely some – far fewer, admittedly – told how they had done relatively well in their initial education, in school and beyond, but had nevertheless left with no desire to resume formal learning.

Since both achievement and enjoyment affect subsequent participation, and therefore further benefits, another simple matrix is called for.

Figure 3: Matrix classifying individual learners



The swans are those who have sailed through their initial education, maybe not without effort but both enjoying their time and leaving with skills and qualifications to show for it. Trudgers have managed the latter, but at a cost. Survivors have gone along for the ride and had a pleasant time without getting much in the way of qualifications out of their time at school. The losers have lost out both ways.

Since we found individuals present in all four categories (or, more accurately, along both dimensions), this means that simplistic assumptions about the role of initial education in subsequent educational experience should be discarded. For example, some of the losers had been left with wholly negative feelings, and it had been enormously difficult for them to bring themselves to resume acquaintance with the education system. But in other cases failure at school had left them with a desire to do better for themselves and a determination, often forcefully expressed, that their children would do better than they did. Sometimes this determination was directed internally within the family, sometimes externally towards the school or the system.

With this as background we can report the following. We stress that we were not conducting an overall evaluation of schools and schooling, but tracing links between people's experience of schooling and their subsequent trajectories.

1. It is remarkable how often the example of a single good teacher was reported, even or especially by those who had not enjoyed school. It must be encouraging that such memories are retained, and have provided a lifeline back into education for people whose initial experience was discouraging. This was not necessarily linked to doing better in the particular subject that that teacher was teaching; at its most basic, it was a matter of being in touch with someone who struck a chord. Even then it was not always a question of actually liking the teacher, but of respecting them and feeling respected by them.

2. School ethos is perhaps a nebulous concept, but it emerges as important for students' self-image and for their attitudes to education subsequently. Instilling and developing a sense of social belonging and responsibility contrasts with undermining and marginalizing students who do not fit in. Respect for others is a significant distinguishing characteristic between the experiences of those educated in England and elsewhere (elsewhere including other parts of the UK). Almost all those who had been schooled in other countries referred to the respect they had had for their teachers, whilst many who had attended schools here, especially losers, referred explicitly to a lack of respect having characterised relations with teachers.

3. Respect is linked to communication and confidence. The ability to communicate effectively with other is something that many schoolchildren clearly lack. This must to some extent be part of growing up, but respondents speak of the difficulties they had, especially in speaking in front of others. Improved communication, at a variety of levels, emerged strongly as a fundamental general benefit, second only to confidence.

4. Relatedly, schools and colleges are important sites of basic socialisation. At one level this is entirely predictable; it is where people first learn to get along with others outside their families. But the importance of this function is easy to overlook precisely because it is so fundamental, especially in a society of increasing cultural diversity.

5. Guidance, whether on subsequent education or on careers, had often been erratic, arbitrary or absent. This is somewhat age-related, since guidance has only assumed prominence in school and post-school curricula relatively recently (and Connexions will already have had an effect). Its absence was not always detrimental, but it could be. And where it was poor it led to stereotyping (on

class or gender lines), or to what could be quite profound feelings of distorted identity.

6. Whether or not it is included in guidance, explicitly underlining the possibility of returning to education would clearly be a positive measure, for all categories. Even if people leave school at the earliest opportunity, with no qualifications, they should know that it is possible to return. Messages of this kind would, on our evidence, be likely to lie dormant but not be lost.

7. Intergenerational equity emerges as a strong policy issue from consideration of initial education. Accounts from older people of being unable to take up a grammar school or even university place because of the costs involved at that historical point were quite common. The equity case is complemented by other effects which show how positive learning can be for older people and their families and communities (see Sections 6 and 8).

8. Progressing from school to college represents an important opportunity to achieve autonomy. Where it works, students feel that they are gaining adult status, and can explore their individuality. This is well understood in the institutions and should be given due recognition, especially in relation to students with special learning needs.

5. Learning contexts and learning experiences

Learning context and learning experience have distinct but interactive effects upon the wider benefits that learning brings to individuals and their communities. They are presented separately for conceptual simplicity, but we do not mean to imply that they operate in isolation.

5.1 Learning context

Learning takes place in a variety of places, including colleges, community centres, schools, homes and hotels. Where learning takes place is closely linked to whom one learns alongside. What we mean here by learning context, then, is both the physical location of learning and the social context in which it takes place.

We refer to learning contexts as ‘familiar’ where they are attuned with the rest of the learner’s life, and resonate more or less directly with life experiences, motivations and interests. Examples include learning at home, family learning that takes place in schools where learners’ children are pupils, and community centres. In these contexts, learners share common characteristics – for example, they are all parents, single parents, women, people originating from a particular region or country, people who have experienced mental health difficulties, of the same age group, who have worked in the same trade, or a combination of these. In unfamiliar learning contexts, participants may not share these characteristics and the context is new to the learner.

Whether a learning context is familiar or not depends not only upon the learning context itself, but also upon the learner's life experience. An unfamiliar learning context might be a university setting for somebody who has not been to university before, or a community centre for somebody who has only studied at university. In addition, what is best for a learner in terms of wider, and indeed more narrowly economic, outcomes of learning depends upon their personal and social resources – which change throughout the life course. Learners can benefit regardless of the context in which they learn. Nevertheless, some outcomes appear to be promoted in some learning contexts more than in others.

We have numerous accounts from respondents who, lacking personal and social confidence initially, enrolled in courses that were closely integrated with their lives. Through these courses, they developed self-esteem, social confidence, and made close friends. In contrast, respondents learning in less familiar contexts talked about the enjoyment of meeting new people rather than the support that they received from them.

5.1.1 The formation of goals and personal development

Where learning in a familiar context resonates directly with the learner's interests and motivations, it is likely that progression will result, leading to goal formation. We see this in the accounts of many parents who, through family learning and involvement in playgroups and nurseries with training components, have discovered not only purpose and direction, but also a means to pursue it.

Several respondents described going to FE college in their late teens as a change that they needed in order to mature. The change was beneficial not only because they were given more responsibility and treated as grown-ups. It was also quite simply about being in a new environment with a new peer group, especially where this included mature students. Coming into contact with people from different backgrounds and walks of life 'opened' respondents' minds and led to the formation of more liberal attitudes.

A clear finding from the fieldwork is that teachers' respect and understanding of students, and their role in group discussions are considered enormously important in terms of wider benefits. These are discussed in more detail under learning experience. Respondents did not talk directly about institutional ethos – possibly because they do not think in those terms. Their experience is of their teacher, whose attitudes and behaviours will be shaped to some degree by the ethos of the institution.

Although most examples of learning occurred in groups, respondents also described learning alone, through reading and watching films. Although individual learning built self-esteem and led to personal development, it did not develop the learner's social skills and confidence in the way that learning in a group tended to. But even learning as an isolated individual can result in wider networks and broader horizons.

5.2 Learning experience

Teaching style and subject area contribute to the learning experience. Four interrelated but distinct aspects of teaching style have emerged from the fieldwork as significant in terms of wider benefits of learning: support and encouragement; guidance; level of pressure; and learning as a group or individual process. The first three aspects impact primarily upon benefits experienced by the individual, although they may lead to community benefits. In contrast, group learning through discussion or collective tasks impacts upon social attitudes and values, and relationships.

5.2.1 Support and encouragement

Supportive teachers were identified as ones who had time for students, gave them the attention they needed, were patient and listened to them. Encouragement, reassurance, praise, and demonstrating a belief in learners were also tremendously important. Support and encouragement helped to build up and sustain self-esteem and confidence in abilities. It is not surprising, then, that it was mostly in relation to basic skills that respondents mentioned their importance. More generally, the respect that teachers paid to every member of the class, the way they listened and responded to them, provided a model from which students learned social values and behaviours.

Teachers can only be supportive and encouraging if they have time. These findings, then, have policy implications relating to class sizes, flexibility of curricula and administrative burdens – especially in relation to courses in basic skills, where support and encouragement appear to be particularly significant in terms of generating both wider benefits and academic success.

5.2.2 Guidance

Respondents described unhelpful or non-existent careers advice when they left school. This evidence is retrospective and so does not reflect current policy or its implementation but the findings are nevertheless a salutary reminder of the dangers of unsatisfactory guidance. Women described being steered towards gendered employment, or were advised to continue with what they were good at, irrespective of progression routes that they claimed to be more interested in. This led to employment that was 'hated', and university courses that had no meaning or purpose and left respondents not knowing why they were there. In one instance, this led to the onset of depression.

5.2.3 Pressure

Where the level of pressure induced by learning was too high, respondents' psychological health suffered. None of the respondents mentioned psychological difficulties arising from exam pressures, which seems surprising given the evidence relating to stress of academic pressure (e.g. Bandura, 1997, pp. 235-236). However, several of the parents interviewed had experienced considerable stress managing family and domestic responsibilities, demanding coursework and, sometimes, employment as well. One respondent described feeling "*split up into lots of bits*". This level of pressure appears to be sustainable by the respondent and those around them because everybody knows that it is a temporary state of affairs.

On the other hand one person had attended a private secondary school that was extremely unpressurised and emphasised cooperation and individualism. She describes the experience as "*not a good preparation ... for business life or fitting in ... [or] group stuff*". Her account suggests that a certain amount of pressure and competition is useful in the education of young people so that they become socialised and able to deal with life in the real, competitive and pressurised world.

Assessment, whether it is through exams, assignments, or general feedback from tutors, introduces the possibility of failure. Some respondents described feeling like failures at school, and the negative impacts this had had upon their confidence and aspirations throughout adulthood. Several of those who had fared poorly in examinations felt that they did "*not function well in exam*" and consequently the results were "*a very unfair reflection*" of their abilities.

This is only one side of the story. Many more respondents (possibly because it is easier to talk about success than failure) recounted their achievements with pleasure and pride. Positive outcomes of assessment built up and sustained self-esteem and social confidence, increased well-being and spurred respondents on to further education and/or employment. The impact was greatest where people felt that they had made great strides forward, but what this reflected in terms of qualification levels and forms of assessment varied from individual to individual.

The pace of learning, level of goal and type of feedback that suit one individual will not necessarily suit others. We found that people who came to learning with low levels of self-esteem, a restricted range of social contacts and poor psychological health including recovery from mental health problems responded well to teaching styles that were non-competitive and non-threatening, whilst more confident individuals with more extended social links appeared to thrive under more pressure. Some respondents described how, as they had become more confident, they had enjoyed learning under increasing levels of pressure.

5.2.4 Learning as a group process

Learning as a group process occurs through collective tasks and through discussion. It ties in with the social context of learning, since the effects of group learning depend upon the mix of those who participate. Our findings suggest that group learning is particularly effective in terms of promoting psychological health, the formation of liberal attitudes and in developing communication and teamwork skills. These are wider benefits that contribute to active citizenship and social cohesion.

Psychological health is sustained and improved because group learning involves participation by all members of the group, which makes the class more interesting and enjoyable. Because students are put under pressure to contribute within a supportive context, their self-esteem and social confidence are boosted.

Group discussions feed into the formation of non-discriminatory attitudes because students are forced to discuss issues with fellow students whom they would not communicate with under different circumstances. This teaches students "*not to stereotype people*". Discussions also develop communication and teamwork skills through throwing together a group of people with similar interests but different backgrounds and ideas to work together towards common goals, with a tutor as facilitator and coordinator. One aspect of communication and teamwork skills that was specifically mentioned as arising from discussion-based learning was the ability to be "*more objective, not to take things personally*".

5.2.5 Subject areas and learning as a group or individual process

Not surprisingly, the effects of learning upon respondents' lives depended partly upon the subjects that they had studied. Two dimensions associated with subject area particularly influenced wider benefits of learning: the extent to which the subject area prompts learners to examine their current position and thinking critically; and the extent to which learning occurs as an individual or group process. Below we explore in quite broad terms the relationship between these two aspects.

Learning as a critical group process emerges in relation to a number of subjects. Some respondents had studied Humanities and the Social Sciences, and rather fewer talked about the effects of professional training and the Performing Arts. There were similarities in their accounts that related to the reflective nature of the subject areas, a broadened framework of understanding and collective – mostly discussion-based – teaching styles. Many respondents mentioned that these subjects had prompted them to question and think independently. Personal growth was achieved as learners reassessed their location within wider structures – social, political, historical and professional, affecting their sense of identity and agency. Respondents had adopted more unprejudiced attitudes and, through the process of group learning, had developed communication and team working skills and a sense of collective enterprise.

Other courses encouraged respondents to reflect critically on a more individual basis. They identified personal growth as an outcome of courses in personal development and counselling through the development of self-understanding, a sense of purpose, and learning to adopt a positive approach. One respondent described how the creative arts involve looking, watching, questioning and self-examination, which had led to her personal growth. Personal growth achieved through the study of these subject areas had had impacts upon aspirations, career paths and family relationships. It had also contributed to improved communication skills and the development of less discriminatory attitudes – these being particularly direct and noted effects of courses in counselling.

Other subject areas had positive outcomes, but these were less to do with developing critical approaches. Respondents described learning Maths and Sciences as experiences that had taught them analytic and problem-solving skills, given them confidence in their abilities, and been enjoyable because the subject was stimulating and they had gained confidence in their abilities. A few respondents had studied the martial arts and these had strengthened them both physically and morally. Learning about survival – how to grow food, how to hunt, about the weather – had given respondents a fundamental type of confidence.

The accounts of respondents suggest a number of ways in which the subject area of learning impacts upon learning outcomes.

ICT is a subject area that leads to rather special wider benefits. Overcoming fears of computers and realising even basic levels of competence in this area were enormously confidence-boosting and made respondents feel "*part of the modern world*". For those who already had some ICT experience, brushing up on their skills made them feel equipped to compete in the labour market, and for parents and grandparents, learning about IT improved relationships with their children and grandchildren. Consequently, learning about ICT facilitated integration of learners into particular communities – namely, the modern world, their children's worlds, and the labour market.

Learning English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) was critical for respondents who had arrived in England with little or no English, in terms of empowering them to cope with the practicalities of day-to-day life, and in terms of social integration. Basic linguistic competence acquired through classes in ESOL enabled respondents to communicate with neighbours, buy things from shops, seek assistance, access services, and communicate with education and health professionals. In addition, attending ESOL classes was a forum for meeting immigrants facing similar difficulties, with whom experiences and useful information such as employment opportunities could be shared.

Creative Arts, Crafts and Creative Writing appear to be particularly beneficial to psychological health. Respondents remarked that these subjects allowed "*self-expression*" and could have "*a cathartic effect*". One respondent gave a graphic description of venting her anger on clay, which is messy and can be "*squished*" and smashed. These subjects also benefit psychological health because they generate visible products that can be admired and given away or sold. This was rewarding for many respondents. In addition, these subjects generate conditions that are conducive to developing friendships because there is little pressure to communicate but plenty of opportunity to do so. One respondent remarked that the mix of students attending classes in the creative arts tended to be greater than the mix attending other classes.

Physical Education (PE) leads to a wide range of benefits. First, it encourages exercise, which is good for physical health. Several respondents described how participation in PE at school had led to physical activities of all sorts throughout their lives. Second, PE is beneficial to psychological and mental health because it is fun, builds confidence, provides a distraction, and can relieve tension and aggression. Third, PE involves discipline, which can be useful for coping with adversity and pursuing goals. Fourth, it teaches people to deal with failure – to be 'a good loser'. This relates to the fifth benefit of PE, which is social integration. Team sports develop teamwork skills and friendships.

Courses in health generate knowledge and skills, which are important in day-to-day life. Respondents had studied a variety of health-related courses, including basic health and safety, aromatherapy, and health studies. Basic knowledge was very reassuring, especially for parents of young children, and skills were applied to treat family members. Knowledge gained through studying health-related subjects helped respondents to accept and cope with family illness, for example, partners' mental illness and children's learning disabilities. In addition, respondents developed an understanding of health that led to changes in their own health behaviours, such as taking more exercise and eating a healthier diet.

Courses in childcare and family history had impacts upon family relationships. Respondents who had studied childcare and parenting had acquired knowledge, understanding and skills that transferred directly to their own parenting, resulting in improved relationships and happier, more confident children. A respondent who studied family history had found the course valuable because she gained a clearer sense of her identity and also because it gave her a shared interest with her mother, which improved their relationship.

> *"It's helping us both in a way of communication. We can sit and talk about things ... It's given us something else to talk about." (Nadine)*

Some courses involve going out as a class to public places, such as libraries, museums, and art galleries. For students lacking confidence to go out (because of domestic ties, a history of learning difficulties, and so on) the experience of making a visit in the public domain protected by the security of the group and the tutor was tremendously empowering and helped them to extend their social spheres beyond the private and into the public.

Opportunity to give. Several respondents mentioned experiences at school where they had helped younger children or raised money for charities, and mentioned how good this had made them feel – "*special*", "*a good feeling*". Awareness of how giving felt had led to more altruistic attitudes, and some respondents volunteered that opportunities to give during school had led to altruistic behaviours in adulthood, such as giving to charities, voluntary work and informally lending a hand.

5.3 Conclusions

Subject areas that challenge the status quo, learning in groups that are mixed, and learning in locations that are unfamiliar are effective in generating those wider benefits of learning that contribute to civic participation, social cohesion and a very positive quality of life. Those who benefit from these learning experiences and contexts are often those who come to learning with relatively high levels of confidence in their abilities, and/or in themselves, and/or socially.

Those who come to learning lacking confidence in their abilities, as individuals and socially, are more likely to engage in and benefit from learning in locations that already have meaning to them within groups that share some characteristics. Group learning is particularly effective in terms of promoting psychological health, the formation of liberal attitudes, and in developing communication and teamwork skills. These are wider benefits that contribute to active citizenship and social cohesion.

The teacher is of tremendous importance in determining the effects of learning upon people's lives, through providing support, encouragement and guidance, through facilitating group processes and group learning and through acting as a role model. This has policy implications for teacher training, but perhaps more fundamentally, for giving teachers more time and less stress. The reduction of administrative burdens, more flexible curricula and small class sizes might be considered – especially in relation to courses in basic skills, where support and encouragement appear to be particularly significant in terms of generating both wider benefits and academic success.

6. Adaptation and change

We turn now to focus primarily on the effects of education and learning after school. We analyse these under the following headings:

- adaptation and change management;
- family lives;
- health;
- social capital.

However there are many overlaps between these areas. This reinforces the need for a holistic understanding of individual cases and the interacting effects, as we illustrate in Part C.

We described in Section 1 how we came to modify the focus of one of the projects, to refer to adaptation and change rather than transition; and how the evidence from the two projects came together, with respondents providing evidence that related to both. 'Adaptation' and 'change' are used here in relation to the specific challenges posed by family life. In this section we concentrate primarily on the evidence from those with children, exploring how learning enabled them to manage the changes that having young children brought about in their lives. But we introduce other evidence on this general theme of adaptation. So although the main focus is on one segment of the life cycle, and how people move on from a period of intensive childcare and domestic responsibility, we refer also to other significant passages in people's lives, for example arriving in England as refugees, taking on caring roles, or active ageing.

To summarise, outcomes of learning and education that helped respondents to adapt and cope include:

Individual

- getting out, and doing something for oneself;
- sense of purpose and hope;
- a structure for daily/weekly life;
- self-confidence, self-belief;
- belief in the world;
- self-awareness, independent thought, autonomy;
- problem-solving skills;
- access to knowledge sources;
- social support and integration.

Community/collective

6.1 Getting away/out, doing something for oneself

Many of the respondents who had small children mentioned that attending classes gave them time away from the home, and modified a lifestyle dominated by childcare and other domestic responsibilities. Because it could be fitted around these responsibilities adult education enabled them to sustain their commitment to their children, but because it was something that they did for themselves and not for anybody else, it also sustained their sense of identity:

> *"Parents need some rest as well because like 24 hours at home doing the housework, shopping and everything and you have a child at home so you don't have any break." (Padma)*

and her course in computing provided such a break.

For Naomi, studying was,

> "*something for me ... It wasn't housework and the husband and the kids ...* [As a mother] *You're just there, sort of cook, washer upper and usual things, you know. Same old routine.*"

Nadine's studies in family history helped her to cope with the stress of having a daughter with ADHD and other problems:

> "*I think I had to get out and do something for myself. I felt bogged down at times and you can't really carry on like that forever because I get stressed and can't cope with it.*"

Some respondents with small children felt that they had become isolated, and in some senses alienated from the "*adult world*". Education provided the opportunity to re-integrate:

> "*[Participation in an IT course had the effect of] getting me back into adult life because I'd been around children a lot, you know, like talking babyish anyway. And as a single parent, it was getting me into the world again, back out there again.*" *(Celia)*

6.2 Sense of purpose and hope

Especially for parents with small children, learning can be important in terms of providing the hope and aspirations that they can move on from this stage of their lives. This is a more transformative effect, as learning helps people to find their direction in life:

> "*[The course has] given me focus, which for the last few years I haven't had. I've just been ... being a mum and I've needed some sort of focus.*" *(Evelyn)*

> "*It's something extra. ... I don't want to be forever housewife. It's no good ... There's nothing except eat, sleep, something like that. You have to have some career.*" *(Daya)*

For others, the purpose is not career-related. For example:

> "*I've got out of myself. I'm doing something useful – to me, it's useful. My family, they don't talk to each other. ... That's why I thought I would like to know who my great-grandfather was.*" *(Naomi)*

There is an interesting dynamic here. People report how courses have "*opened up doors*" for them, giving them exciting perspectives for the future. One even referred to the prospect of going to university as a "*golden apple*" that was now within her grasp. But balancing this is also the notion that education allows people to develop a focus, and in that sense to close off some avenues and concentrate on a narrower range of options.

This sense of hope and purpose was also important for respondents who had come to this country without much English. Several respondents had been well-qualified in their own countries and arrived in England without a means of communication, and without recognition of their previous achievements. Many of those in this category were seeking asylum or had refugee status. Participation in courses in ESOL and other basic skills had given them hope for their futures in this country.

6.3 Structure

Education is flexible but nevertheless provides a structure to their daily or weekly lives that respondents appreciated. This helped respondents to cope with their lives in a number of ways:

> "*Waking up in the morning ... you didn't have a schedule ... It was like dropping the children off but then coming back ... You don't have to do the Hoover because I'm in all day anyway ... There is no timetable, and I found myself not really motivating myself and I knew I could do better.*" *(Kali)*

Doing a course improved her psychological health enormously.

Denise was not in danger of developing depression, but she had expected life to be wonderful as a parent not in employment, and when it came to it, she felt the need of some external stimulus to give her life structure:

> "*You're at home with the children, so you can't do anything ... If you don't do anything, nothing's going to happen ... That's when I started getting involved in mother and toddler group, and then I was on the Playgroup Committee ... and doing the Learning through Play course and the Child Development course.*"

Mandisa also appreciated the structure that college provided:

> "*It was nice because it was routine.*"

The routine, clearly, was different from the daily round of domestic work.

6.4 Self-confidence

Confidence acquired through education helped respondents to cope with their lives in a number of ways:

- Education gave Elsa the confidence that she could cope with life after her husband left her with three kids.

- For Denise, the confidence she developed through participation in an IT course helped her to face the fact that there was something seriously wrong with her son, and to seek appropriate help.

- Mandisa trained in carpentry and later in building management, where she faced attitudes and behaviours that were sexist. The confidence in her abilities that she acquired through these courses helped her to cope with the sexist attitudes of fellow students and lecturers at college, and with colleagues at work subsequently.

> "*I think it made me more determined. 'I can do it, I can do it with any of the guys'. And I suppose that has aided me because to be able to work ... You have to ignore comments, or give as good as you get.*"

- Aurea had experienced severe difficulties when she moved to England with little English or knowledge of the country, and attended a school where there appears to have been no extra support, and where she was ignored. She describes how her previous experiences in school in her own country (Venezuela) contributed to a sense of her own worth and a belief that things would turn out alright in the end, which sustained her through her difficulties:

> "*Those memories [of school] helped me to be able to say, 'You can do it, of course you can. You're more than able to do it if you just keep focusing, move on, carry on and you will make it. One day you will make it.'*"

This reflects a belief that there is an element of justice in the world, which appears to have developed, partly at least, through school.

- Danielle had stopped work to care for her children and disabled mother:

> "*I just felt that all I was doing was caring for other people, and I wasn't doing anything for myself ... I'd really come down and the confidence and the buzz I'd got from working had totally gone within a matter of nine months I would say, so when I came to this course it took me a few weeks to get back in the rhythm of learning again I really took off, back in a sort of learning situation, doing my homework, etc. I thoroughly enjoyed it, and my confidence came back up and from that I then joined a women's group – a women's self-help group and at the*

> *time they were organising a big day in [area of Greater Nottingham] – a lifestyle change day and I sort of came into my own then and did loads of things for that.*"

This quote crisply illustrates how learning for personal change (Quadrant A in Figure 2, p. 12) can lead directly to learning for social transformation (Quadrant D).

6.5 Self-awareness, independent thought, autonomy

Stacey explained how adult education had led to her personal development:

> "*[Adult education in creative subjects] makes you think of issues that might be difficult and might be things you haven't wanted to think about before because they might be difficult to think about ... and then perhaps deal with them.*"

A counselling course helped because:

> "*it makes you think about your feelings. ... I'd never done that before. ... I'd always done as I was told.*" *(Stacey)*

The prime message of one interview was the notion of education as a *shock absorber*. The respondent refers several times to the way education gave her independence, the ability to stand on her own two feet. She experienced terrible acrimonious relations living with her husband's family and explains that partly as a consequence of her previous education, she would not submit to her mother-in-law's "*emotional blackmail*" but was able to fight back and maintain autonomy.

Denise describes the difficulties she experienced attempting to find out what was wrong with her son. It was not until he was seven years old that he was eventually diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. Denise feels that her education did not help initially because it had discouraged independent thought:

> "*You've got your knowledge from books. I hadn't been at that level to question...[...]..When I was at school, you sat there and were taught and you kept quiet ... This is how it is. Don't question it ... You would just accept. It was the same at college to a certain degree ... Because it's written down, it must be true sort of thing. The person's an expert.*"

This attitude caused Denise problems when her son did not develop as he was expected to:

> "*Read the books. They tell you what to do and it's not working. It must be me. I'm doing wrong. ... This is how it should be and it's not. [...] I'm not talking to him enough, like the book said. ... What am I doing wrong?*"

However, a Masters course counteracted this effect by encouraging Denise to think for herself more.

6.6 Problem-solving skills

Dale explains how learning plumbing at college, and self-taught learning using a manual to mend cars, has taught him an approach to problem-solving that combines patience, perseverance and a logical approach.

> *"It [working on boilers at college] helped me to be more patient when I'm working with boilers because it takes time. You know you have to take time. ... It teaches you patience."*

From using a commonly used manual to mend cars, Dale has learnt a logical approach to problem-solving, which he applies to mending boilers also.

> *"First time I worked on a car was my own car. I was in the middle of nowhere when it broke down. I didn't have a clue. ... So I'm rooting through it [a basic manual]. 'Check this, check this, check this' and I suppose that's where it came from. He told you where to start checking and work your way back. And I've always done it the same way."*

This is a nice example of a transferable skill, to be set alongside Lydia's skill, acquired through learning to teach dances, of handling family matters (see Section 10).

6.7 Knowledge sources

Education enables respondents to acquire knowledge, through enabling them to read, through inclining them to read for information, and through providing access to books and other forms of information. This helped a number of respondents to cope with difficult circumstances.

Gamal's formal human capital has given him the capacity and the confidence to mobilise knowledge, and his membership of the institutions through which this was gained gave him access to physical stocks of knowledge. His learning had helped him tackle health problems, both in respect of his wife and in bringing up his child in a healthy fashion:

> *Gamal: "They [the first years of parenting] were difficult. I didn't have any experience about raising children at all and I didn't get any help from anybody. The Social Services didn't help, nobody helped, you know. It was terribly hard with the child, 'He is yours, you look after him', and that was that, really."*
>
> *Interviewer: "Okay. So how did you cope?"*

> *Gamal: "I tried my best, tried my best. You know. I had to learn. Read books, went to the library, went to bookshops, bought books about raising children up, read them, they gave me certain ideas, and, yes ... "*
>
> *Interviewer: "Okay. Can you tell me about some of the things you read, or some of the things you learned in those first ... year or two?"*
>
> *Gamal: "Yes, it is just how to raise children, there is one book in particular, 'Between 1 and 5', and it was quite helpful, how to feed, how to change the nappies, their sleeping pattern, how many times you wake up at night to feed them, things like that, yes, and ... extremely helpful, yes."*

It is not only a matter of possessing the skills, but having access to the facilities where they can be exercised. Gamal was enabled to cope in unfamiliar and unexpected circumstances by his previous education. His life was transformed by taking on single parenthood, but sustained by the access to collective knowledge that his education gave him.

Other respondents reported how access to dictionaries had helped in a variety of ways – a traditional but nonetheless immensely valuable knowledge source. Less traditional sources include websites, which accounts in part for the increased confidence generated by even minor acquisition of IT skills.

Lastly, but in a sense of primary importance, is the confidence to admit ignorance and to ask for help when you do not know something. This gives access to other people as sources of knowledge, and also of advice and information on further channels.

7. Family lives

It is a truism that family structures have become more complex, as demographic and social trends combine to produce a bewildering array of changing relationships. The effects of learning are correspondingly variegated, but they can be grouped under three broad headings:

- the (reciprocal) relationships between parents' attitudes and behaviour and their children's education;
- enhancing adults' capacity to do a good job as parents;
- the effects on relationships within the family, including the extended family.

7.1 Interactions between parental and children's learning

These interactions can be categorised as follows:

- *valuing:* as a result of their own participation in learning, parents come to give more value to their children's educational achievement;
- *understanding*: parents come to understand more of what their children's education entails;
- *supporting*: parents are more able to offer support to their children, directly in their studies or indirectly by involvement in their school;
- *role modelling*: parents supply a model as learner for their children;
- *reciprocity*: children help their parents, giving them motivation for or support in their learning.

We start with a perverse effect. Some respondents have reacted to their own negative experiences of school, and are doing things differently in order that their own children will have a different and more positive experience. Evelyn's negative experiences of school have affected how she has approached her son's schooling.

> "*I was picked on by the teachers for being different and for being independent and for standing up and speaking for myself, and that is what I will not tolerate … My attitude is I don't want him disrupting the class, I do want him doing his work, but I want it recognised that he's independent, that he's got a personality.*"

A more predictable positive effect occurs when as a result of their own learning a parent is able to show interest in their child's learning and pride in their achievements. Faith's younger son is interested in history and asked her to bring home any treasure that she finds (from her archaeology course dig). She has lots of books at home on castles, which her younger son would take to school for his project work. He has also benefited from her knowledge and books on ancient Egypt:

> "*Yes, they're doing a play at the moment about ancient Egypt, like their end of term play, so I've managed to show what the costumes were like and what they wore and they've had to make up their own costumes at school, so it's been quite beneficial.*"

A common motivation for adults becoming involved in learning was a desire to keep up with children. The most common area in which this showed itself was in relation to IT, as Denise illustrates:

> "*You feel as if you're part of the modern world … I am conscious that I'm an older mother … Just keeping up with them, the latest technology that they're going to use.*"

Doing the IT course led to Denise buying a computer for home. This is used by herself, her husband and the children. The children play educational games and use dictionaries and encyclopaedias. They work on it with Denise. They use the Internet together.

> "*If they hit a problem, I feel more confident about what to do [as a result of the course].*"

One of Catherine's motivations to learn came through seeing her own children advance beyond her own learning:

> "*I'm doing an English course because I'm not up to the standard that my children are, amazing as it can be.*"

Similarly, Hermione started with a computer course:

> "*because it was embarrassing that my kids knew more than I did.*"

By taking learning seriously, adults offer a good 'learner' role model for children. For example, Cliff's children are proud that he and his wife are "*going to school*"; they seem to be setting them a good example:

> "*We told them we passed our exams; they were so happy for us and it was kind of a motivation for them also to do the same.*"

Kashani's own studying enables her to act as a role model for her daughter, in good family learning style:

> "*It's a good effect of my learning because I keep telling her 'I've got an assignment to do and I've got to get on with my homework' ... and it's like 'You carry on with your assignment, I'm carrying on with mine.' It's a positive effect – it's like a role model as well because she sees her mum doing it.*"

In some impressive cases, the whole family learns together. Annabel's family learns together from the computer and CD-ROMs. They also set aside time each day when everyone is quiet, doing homework, college work or reading:

> "*... when they see me seated and reading it makes them concentrate more...the atmosphere looks easier for you to learn. That's what we've trained them to do. At least when, because my learning time starts at 6 o'clock to 8 o'clock so from 6 o'clock to 8 o'clock everyone is quiet, there is no noise, all the doors are closed, everyone is seated so it makes it easier for them as well as us.*"

In a similar vein, there are some pleasing examples where the support from the parent is reciprocated by the children, as with Gloria:

> *"When I first went to college the children were great. They gave me loads of back-up and said 'Yes, come on Mum.' I've always said to the kids 'no TV till you've done your homework' or you can't have this till you've done your homework, get your work, you've got to read your books' or something like that. That's what they did to me last year when I first started: 'Come on Mum, do your homework and then you can watch TV."*

To finish, the following quotation illustrates the interaction between a small episode of family learning, acquisition of IT skills and a father's general confidence; the outcome, as the rest of the interview revealed, was a dramatic transformation of Alasdair's future prospects:

> *" ... she said 'Oh it's easy Dad, you click onto that and then you get the picture and then you can type', and I said to her, I said 'That is the last time you ever show me how to use a computer' and she said to me 'Am I in trouble?', I said 'No you've just changed my life'. And I thought, sod it – nervous or not nervous I will go for this, and I decided that by the time I was 40 that I would give myself the opportunity to have a career."*

7.2 Doing a better job as a (grand)parent

Parents report a variety of ways in which their participation in courses has helped them do a better job as a parent, whether or not the courses had any overt link to parenting. The benefits included:

- more confidence in their own ability as a parent;
- an improved capacity to communicate with their children;
- greater understanding or patience;
- more practical skills, for example in devising good games;
- understanding more about how others approach parenting;
- enhanced capacity to see things from a child's view, and to understand them as a member of a peer group.

Unsurprisingly, this effect is most clearly expressed by those who have been on courses designed to improve parenting, or similar topics. Thus Ede's 'parent pack' courses have helped her in terms of teaching her children to be responsible and enhancing their self-esteem:

> *" ... it helps me in the aspect of seeing what I'm doing is teaching my children to be responsible adults at the end of the day, and I mean I actually turn round to them now, and like my 8-year-old son will, when he takes his clothes off, put them in the washing machine and turn the washing machine on. And I bet there*

> *aren't that many 8-year-old boys who'd do that. I just, and I think that's good for him, because it boosts his self-esteem – he can do that, of course he can do that. And he can turn on the television, so of course he can turn on the washing machine I mean, it's actually simpler – there's only one button to press.*"

Clara has done a childcare course, which has helped her to interact with her child. She knows how to treat him now, how to play with him more, to read him books, to do things with paper. They both enjoy the time more now.

Mandisa's family learning group involved making things to play with, with her child. This was something she had always wanted to do, but never had the time. She felt good about it and "*he was really chuffed, like 'My mum made this for me' ... that bit was really nice and watching him play with it*". Mandisa is also learning about children of her son's age through her work at the school, which has taught her greater tolerance. Before, she had high expectations of him that may have been unrealistic for a four-year-old.

> "*I wasn't aware that I was doing that until I came into the school and I became a little more relaxed and not so bothered about, to a certain extent, about the things that he did.*"

But similar effects come from studying that is not explicitly geared to parenting or family life. Naomi says:

> "*I've got more patience ... I think I got a lot of that from my tutor, actually, because the way she's sat with me and helped me. I learnt from her to sit and help [my daughter].*"

This is a specific consequence of Naomi's better understanding of the process of learning.

Faith thinks she is a better mum because she has other interests:

> "*I mean, there's nothing wrong with people who stay at home all the time; that's up to them, but I know I couldn't do it and I think because I'm happier, because I've got my own interest and own little life, that I'm a better mum to them ... I think I can deal with them better because I've got other things that fulfil my life and what I need to do. The time I spend with them, I suppose, is more precious to me, you know, I can make more of it.*"

Candice's literacy and numeracy courses have given her a lot of ideas about games and activities to do with the children. They have learned social skills, e.g. about how to deal with bullying. Her courses on disability have taught the children about disability issues and brought them into contact with handicapped people.

> *"Mine will ask questions about why do they call them this and what sort of disabilities there is. They've all asked questions about that which I couldn't answer before without doing the course."*

This kind of benefit goes beyond the nuclear family, both more widely, to nephews or nieces, and over more than one generation, to grandchildren. Catherine uses her education to help her extended family and takes an active role in their learning. She is teaching her nephew to read as well because her sister can't read herself. She considers that her learning has benefited her family and her friends, and that she has been able to pass her knowledge down from the short courses she has attended.

Beryl can now help her grandchildren with their reading and writing, which she couldn't do before. The confidence this has given her has transformed her relations with her children, and helped her sustain herself in her role as carer for her housebound husband.

Through craft classes, Elsbeth has made a fairy outfit for her granddaughter, she has made furniture during woodwork that her children "*keep grabbing*", and clothes, toys, a rug, stained glass, ornaments. As a result of the woodwork class, she has sorted out some aspects of her daughter's fitted kitchen. Her reasons for making things for the children and grandchildren are no longer principally to save money: it is for the sense of achievement and to give the children something special:

> *"It's not to save money. It's an achievement making it. It's something new, it's something different when you make it for the kids and nobody else has got it."*

One indirect benefit to the children is almost the mirror image of the 'getting me out of the house' one, in that it enables the children to broaden their range of social relationships through access to a college crèche or other facilities. Thus Mandisa's going to college to do Maths GCSE when her son was 18 months was a good opportunity for him to go to the crèche, where she was close by and could be reached easily.

> *"He was integrating himself into his own little world with his own friends and he was being a little bit more independent because he was without me, which was good."*

Similarly, getting involved in education had positive effects on Patricia's children, since they were left in the college nursery to mix with other children and received stimulation from a source other than the home:

> *" ... they enjoyed the time because they knew that on certain days they'd do other things as opposed to just being with mum all the time. So they've enjoyed the different areas that they've gone into."*

Parents talked about college as a flexible opportunity to spend time away from their children as a preparation for the separation that would be necessitated by their return to work. For Celia, attending college was an opportunity for her,

> "*not to worry about the kids, you know, sort of thing, so it helps you relax, getting you back into it slowly ... so when the time came and I went to work I was already used to leaving my children, you know. I was pretty much there and quite confident that they were happy enough, before I went back to work, anyway.*"

Plus, the course was more flexible than work.

7.3 Improving family relationships

These kinds of effect cover relationships with children, but also with partners, parents or more widely. They enable people to sustain the fabric of family life, and on occasion also to transform it. Faith reports that her history studies have changed her children's perception of her:

> "*I think they're quite impressed sometimes that I know what I know. It takes a lot to impress my children.*"

Education led to Kali feeling happier, and this has improved her relationship with her husband. In fact, he has had to start taking a share of the domestic responsibilities:

> "*More of the weight's come back onto him because I've got a job now, so, you know, he's had to kind of get up and pull his socks up a bit more, and push his weight around the house a bit as well. ... With me moving up in my work [as a result of recent learning], he's kind of got more proud of me and he's accepted it, and, you know, he really does help now, you know. He'll pick the children up, whereas before I used to pick them up from the school.*"

Nadine's parents are elderly, and she had found it hard to maintain substantive communication with them because of their inactivity. Now her mother is becoming interested in the family history that Nadine is doing, and helping by looking out some old records.

> "*It's helping us both in a way of communication. We can sit and talk about things ... It's given us something else to talk about.*"

As already noted, a major health benefit to parents of young children is that education takes them out of the home and their daily routines. This in turn can improve wider family relationships. Thus Madeline's husband, sister-in-law and uncle are also pleased that she is at college because she is getting out of the house and not so depressed.

Lydia feels she has become more tolerant and understanding of others' positions:

> *"this year we're going on holiday with my sister's family. I would never have thought of it in the past. I wanted it to be me on my own or with my family and just shut off the world you know and they want to be with people so they wanted to go with us, so we said 'OK we'll all go together' and that's a bit of a compromise on my part because it means having to work – you know, do things with other people. What they want rather than what we want and the time factor is never great on a holiday because there's only a couple of weeks so it meant now I'm more tolerant and more sharing."*

At a different level, Gloria had suffered domestic violence at the hands of her children's father, and left him. He stopped drinking and regained his driving licence. They seem now to be back together, or at least in communication:

> *"It [the course] turned my life around a lot. I've seen a lot from the children's father, a lot of hassles that he's given me. I used to just sit and take it, but I don't anymore. I've seen a different side to him as well. It's like somebody has switched the light on."*

That metaphor puts the effect well towards the transforming end of the sustaining–transforming spectrum. Yet it is clear how much covert influence education has in sustaining, and gradually improving, family relationships.

8. Health

Different kinds of health effect overlap and interact with each other considerably. There is significantly more evidence on mental and psychological health effects than on physical ones.

As identified in the matrix in Figure 2 (p. 12), there is a continuum of effects from the preventive/sustaining to the curative/transformational. Just as education plays a role in protecting mental health, it is also important in assisting in the recovery of individuals who have experienced a mental health breakdown. Education aids both protection of and recovery from mental health through:

Individual

- providing distraction from problems;
- providing a vehicle for self-expression and catharsis;
- re-establishing the ability to relax;
- providing a structure;

- building self-esteem;
- developing a positive sense of identity;
- fun and enjoyment;
- mental fitness;
- building self-efficacy;
- developing a new sense of role and social identity – or replacing the one that the individual had before their breakdown;
- helping people to identify their direction and goals and achieve them;
- giving people confidence in relation to others;
- helping people to feel part of the social world (social integration).

Collective/community

There is a continuum running from protection against the onset and progression of mental health difficulties to positive psychological health that enables individuals to fulfil their potential both as individuals and as members of society. Elsbeth's experience was of recovering from a breakdown:

> *"I just started throwing myself back into my artwork. In the hospital, my brother brought me a sketch pad and some pencils and he said, 'Now get drawing again. Get yourself back again'. I started drawing again. ... It's helped a lot because concentrating on what you were doing made you forget your troubles and eventually everything starts evening out...[...]. It stops me thinking."*

This sort of experience was shared by respondents who had not had recent breakdowns but who nevertheless had anxieties that learning experiences could provide distraction from:

> "*You went there [to the drama class] and whatever your sort of problems were you'd got, you just kind of completely put them aside because you'd got involved in this other thing and had a lot of fun.*" *(Stacey)*

Effects of this kind – undramatic but nevertheless significant – are a major wider benefit of learning. Without in any sense being designed as therapeutic, education helps people get away from the stress of daily life and actively recuperate, as well as learning something specific. One of its most powerful effects, in short, is the *sustaining effect of learning on mental health and well-being*.

Learning can help people to gain access to essential information and help to improve their own health or that of family or friends. We can identify two principal ways in which this occurs.

a) Education enables individuals to *communicate with professionals* more effectively. As well as enabling them to understand what is being said to them, so that they can understand the advice, it enables them to communicate more effectively with the relevant service-providers, offering them fuller accounts for diagnosis and (presumably, though we heard nothing specific on this account) more accurate accounts of the effect of their treatment.

- *Learning English* enables communication.
  For respondents who have recently arrived in England and who do not speak English, learning some English through ESOL classes enables them to communicate with their doctor and form a relationship with them.

- Education provides some *shared rules of communication*: the kinds of things to say, when to keep quiet, the terminology. This is well articulated by Denise, whose son has Asperger's syndrome:

> "*Because I went to grammar school and then I worked in a hospital laboratory for 20 years – but because I've come from that background, you're able to talk to people at the same level. You know what to say, when to keep quiet ... It's the same with teachers and everyone ... You're educated to their level [...]. [Denise feels that in order to communicate with professionals you need to know what] language to use. It's like the language you use with teachers and everybody, professionals. Because I've had the education, I've got the language.*"

- Education develops individuals' *literary communication* skills, particularly in terms of writing formal letters to professionals, as Stacey explains:

> "*I'm good at writing letters. I'm good at writing and I'm quite good at researching as well and finding out information and that's all to do with my past education and experience ... Though education doesn't help you to prepare for children ... for the emotional and physical impact ... it does prepare you to be able to beat the system.*"

When education develops individuals' abilities or competencies to deal with systems this may benefit the individual and their family, but not society, where allocation of funds is supposed to depend upon level of need rather than ability to put one's case. In fact, those better able to put their case are probably those who are more advantaged in other ways – apart from the particular problems that they are experiencing.

b) Education enables people to *access information sources for themselves*. This may be in tandem with professional assistance, or in isolation from it – or even in opposition to it, where individuals feel unhappy with the advice or treatment they are getting.

Education leads to the acquisition of knowledge and understanding about ill health and health-related issues via the following mechanisms:

- acting as a forum for the exchange of information. Two simple examples are advice from a classmate that the respondent's son, who had problems with his ears, should wear a hat when swimming to stop water getting into his ears; and information from a teacher that helped a respondent's neighbour to deal with her health problem.

- the provision of health and safety information. Respondents confirmed that they had used this knowledge to deal with their children's health, and they mentioned that having the knowledge made them feel "*more comfortable*".

- developing the inclination and ability, as well as providing the opportunity to read relevant literature. Several respondents mentioned that they had used books to learn about health conditions suffered by relatives. For example, Gamal's wife was diagnosed with schizophrenia soon after the birth of their child and he used books to learn about the condition.

The interaction between different forms of educational effect can be well illustrated using these categories. For example, the general confidence effect enables people to articulate their cases better, and to provide the kinds of corrective input that any service needs in order to maintain quality. Basic language skills are essential to such articulation, obviously, but the confidence factor goes well beyond this. Using books is obviously dependent upon a certain level of literacy competence; but it is also linked to having access to books, which is often provided by membership of an educational institution. This in turn is not simply a question of whether a person is or is not a current student enrolled in an institution with a library, but whether they have within themselves a model of library usage.

8.1 Health and self

At a more fundamental level, learning enables people to achieve, maintain or retrieve a sense of identity, essential to good mental and psychological health. The categories into which our data fall again overlap considerably but it is possible to distinguish the following aspects, without entering into detailed psychological theory:

a) a sense of one's own *identity*, distinct from, although attached to, other members of one's family or the wider community. This obviously came through particularly strongly in our fieldwork because of our focus in one project on the parents of young children, but other people have had similar experiences. For example, we can hypothesise that carers may well experience the same effect, with education providing a means of preserving their own identity within a particularly demanding personal relationship.

b) *self-awareness* or self-understanding. Learning provides people with insight into and understanding of their own personality and dispositions. This may be as a consequence of education that touches on these issues directly, for example through psychology or counselling courses, and powerful effects are attributed in some instances. But there is a much more diffuse effect, as learners come to understand their own place in the world through having a wider and more clearly understood set of reference points on which to construct their self-understanding. This could be in relation to their ethnic group, their personal, class or community history, their gender or any other of a wide range of social factors. (This effect is mentioned most often in relation to courses in the humanities or social sciences.)

The effects of such exploration are not always comfortable or even ultimately positive. This is the risk factor in learning, as people explore what can be dangerous territory. Examples amongst our respondents include: Lydia, who felt that her professional as well as personal identity was on the line; and Enid, who, though generally very happy with the effect of her education on her family including her husband, was nevertheless worried that if she changed too far it would threaten her marriage, as she knew had happened in other cases. Naomi referred to herself as "*splintered*". But good education provides a relatively safe environment for people to improve their understanding of themselves, directly or indirectly.

c) Finally, there is the recurrent *self-esteem* theme. Not only do people come to a clearer understanding of self, but also they come to value that self more highly. Again, we would not wish to engage in professional psychologising, but the evidence is consistently strong. Learners come to see themselves as having something to offer to themselves and to others. They may reinterpret their achievements to date, and re-evaluate their potential achievements in the future.

8.2 Negative effects on health

We should also report some negative effects of learning on health:

- *Stress*: Bianca is a keen student, with a history of attending courses on a variety of subjects. However, she gave up her course because it severely aggravated her asthmatic condition.

- *Peer group norms/pressure:* Gareth was introduced to a heavy drug culture as a result of enrolling in college. This led straight on to a serious drug 'career' (see Section 10).

9. Social capital and social cohesion

We turn now to two concepts which overlap, and whose definitions are not universally established. As potential outcomes of learning, social capital and social cohesion share a concern with values, with active community life and with the way people relate to each other. The essential difference in our treatment of the two concepts lies in the rather broader range we attribute here to social cohesion, without attempting to force too neat a distinction.

9.1 Social capital

We break down social capital into the following: civic skills and engagement; social networks; and social values such as trust and tolerance. In each case we present evidence on the links with learning.

Civic skills

We need first to make a distinction between two ways in which learning leads to the development of civic skills. These illustrate the distinction made in Section 1 above, between direct and indirect effects. *Directly*, participation in learning enables people to acquire relevant skills as part of their learning, whether or not the course explicitly sets out to deliver such skills. *Indirectly*, taking part in the courses gives people access to opportunities for civic engagement, through which they can develop or exercise skills. Again this is irrespective of whether or not the course is related to the activity. We concentrate on the direct links, since these have most salience, but we need to recognise the ways in which the institutions and networks that provide education also offer people opportunities to take part in civic activity.

Learning was instrumental for many of our respondents in providing competences that were of use in their civic life. Three broad categories of civic competence were identified:

- *meta-competences* enabled individuals to coordinate other civic aptitudes such as core skills, local knowledge and networks in a holistic fashion in order to achieve personal and community goals.

- *generic competences* were broad skills that were applicable to civic situations such as computer skills and the ability to run a meeting.

- *conditional competences* were required for participation as an active citizen. These include basic language and literacy skills, but also an understanding of the system.

However, not all learning aptitudes that individuals brought to their civic life could be neatly placed into the competence framework. For example, some individuals used their cultural skills or talents to enrich civic life, such as performing music in local bars or making political points through music.

Meta-competences

Some individuals in the sample had achieved a holistic understanding of various generic civic skills, networks and local information through learning. Many of them were engaged in specific learning activities, such as studying for the Community Development Award (CDA) although it was clear that individuals had already achieved a level of 'meta-' or 'coordinating' competence through prior learning activities, and the purpose of the CDA was to accredit prior learning.

Juliet makes reference to the effect of prior learning through counselling, computing and 'make life experience count' courses on addressing community problems:

> *"We really got ourselves so geared up that we could go off for an hour and sort out the Borough Council and it was a really good learning curve to say that we'd got those skills and hadn't realised. To actually have a problem there and with all the experience we've had with the voluntary sector is to say yes, we know, because it wasn't a blank sheet. If we'd sat there and thought 'how do we do that?' But it's because we were working in a community and we could relate to it. You then thought, yes, we can sort it out."*

This proactive approach to solving community problems points to the links between civic meta-competence and a sense of personal agency that has been referred to earlier. Many respondents demonstrating such a coordinating competence were women, which suggests that there are interactions between gender and learning with respect to social capital. This may be due to the affective, as well as behavioural, components associated with this particular meta-skill, and learning configurations that include personal development courses such as counselling and life skills seem particularly fruitful in producing this arrangement. As Jasmine says of the CDA:

> *"There's a lot of personal development on this course. Actually spurring off your own beliefs, your own thoughts, the way your type of work lies about you, where it came from you as a person. And also the fact that there's so much more room to promote, there's so much opportunity to sort of go and do things which will link up with the work which you have been doing."*

Generic competences

A number of generic skills gained from other learning contexts were directly applicable to civic life. These included IT skills, secretarial and teaching skills. For example, Faith used her secretarial and IT skills in order to type letters for a group to raise money for deaf children. Whilst Faith is motivated by altruistic motives in this pursuit, Annabel utilised similar skills in a voluntary context to find employment, showing the close congruence between individual and social benefits of learning:

> *" ... you are volunteering for yourself because you are taking your time to go and do something instead of being paid for it, so there's no-one earning anything from you being there. It's you and your brain earning something from them ... you don't volunteer for anyone, you volunteer for yourself."*

Teaching skills were also generically transferred into civic contexts. These may be informally acquired skills such as being taught in a Bible study class and continuing to teach others, or more formally acquired teaching and training skills.

Conditional/basic competences

At the level of minimal civic competence, the ability to speak English for non-native speakers was central in a number of biographies. For example, for Daya, a Somali woman, learning English led to her participation in her children's primary school. For Audrey from the Philippines it has meant that she is able to communicate with her neighbours. Rajani, a Tanzanian, was able to translate for others in her community.

More generally, this civic competence may act as a form of cultural capital in helping communities access welfare resources, making the difference between being an 'alert' rather than 'inert' consumer of these services. As Kirana, a Bengali woman, states:

> *"It's all about systems and in order to live in Britain you have to know the systems, explaining systems to people ... If you have knowledge you share it with other people. If you don't have it, you have nothing to share ... If you have, for example, chewing gum, then you share it, like you offer it to other people."*

Clara, originally from Colombia, also used English to help others to negotiate welfare services:

> *"How many people in this street don't know how to cope? They have trouble and they need to explain that. They don't know. How many people are sick? They went to the doctor 'I'm sick' 'What's the matter with you?' 'I don't know how to explain it'. But if you have an interpreter, you do."*

9.1.1 Networks

The beneficial influence of education on the size and maintenance of social networks is well established, although less has been said concerning the effect of education on the quality of these social networks. There are a number of ways in which our biographies illuminated the relationship between learning and social networks. In broad terms, taking part in education can:

- *extend* a person's networks;
- *enrich* existing networks;
- *repair* or reconstruct networks;

- and on occasion *dismantle* them.

Significantly, for some individuals education and learning sites actually became the networks and neighbourhoods of learners. Although this is probably the received perception of students in universities, it was also the case that in further and adult education colleges these relationships were apparent. In the case of Gareth, a former drug addict who isolated himself from social interaction for many years, the College had led to the acquisition of a sense of community:

> *" ... there's a pub over the road from the College, where after some of the evening classes that I do, we'll go and have a game of pool and a pint. And, I've become really friendly with the people there. So that's become part of the College community as well. And it's not necessarily people from College."*

The role of education and learning as a hub of social networks for young men and women is heavily contingent on other circumstances. For example, in the case of Gamal, a single parent in his thirties, childcare responsibilities meant that he could not develop social networks through his course:

> *"Once I've finished the course I have to ... Well the course that I did. Integrated Business Technology. I had to run as quick as I finished. We finished the course at three o'clock and I had to collect my child at half past three. So, no socialising whatsoever."*

In many cases, education leads to an extension of social networks, or an enrichment of existing ones. Perry, 40, was bullied at school, left with no qualifications and since then has had only a few casual jobs. However, adult education has developed his social networks:

> *"Since I came to College I've made a lot more friends and spoken out more and talked to a lot of people as well."*

Perry now goes to the pub, cinema and "*everywhere*" with these friends and states that the class feels like a "*nice family*'.

Education can also lead to a reconstruction of social networks and friendships. For example, Jasmine developed her self-esteem through a counselling course and became aware of the negative features of some of her current relationships, although given her professional status as a counsellor she may have possessed not only the self-esteem but the cultural and economic resources to make this possible:

> *Jasmine: "Yes, when I went through my counselling training, obviously you go through a lot of stuff within yourself and I went into therapy and discovered things from the past that were still there and were holding me back from moving on. And so I went through a process of therapy and healing and I moved on.*

And when I moved on because I became more of the person that I truly am, other people didn't like it because in a certain sense I used to conform in some ways and it used to make me angry because it wasn't really me."

Interviewer: "Which people?"
Jasmine: "Because they couldn't manipulate me any more. It was friends. And I decided that the way I wanted to live my life through moving on was totally different and I didn't dismiss unkindly the people around me. I just needed a different sort of person around me, a different sort of person around me, a different sort of support system and nurturing and different mentors because I'd moved on a bit. "

For these networking individuals, education has differing functions in structuring their social lives. However, although individuals support each other within social networks and this is important for individual well-being, social relationships of this type do not necessarily extend towards the community in a wider sense.

9.1.2 Values

We encouraged respondents to talk freely about how learning had impacted upon their values in general, before asking more specific questions concerning those values particularly pertinent to the formation of social capital: tolerance and trust. Only one respondent refused to answer any questions on values, stating that "*I can't stand political issues*", and that she would leave any course that expected her to discuss these.

In this section, we mainly concentrate on the ways in which learning influences values related to tolerance, understanding and respect for others. The distinction between tolerance, understanding and respect is important as tolerance alone implies a rather minimal activity in terms of accepting certain infringements of one's rights. Understanding and respect imply that individuals have understood and even adopted others' perspectives and perhaps actively engaged with individuals from other communities. These activities are instrumental in promoting 'bridging' social capital between groups. Tolerance of other ethnic groups was an emergent benefit of learning but so too was tolerance in terms of categories of social class, gender, sexuality, nationality, religion and often stigmatised groups such as young single mothers or asylum-seekers.

We identified four broad mechanisms by which learning influenced tolerant values: social mix and communication, role models, subject effects and resistance.

Social mix and communication

A mix of pupils or students from different backgrounds on a course appears to be a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for the development of tolerant attitudes.

Additionally important is some form of communicative action between members of the group. This normally, but not always, includes class discussion. For example, Louise, a middle-class art therapist, changed her views of Asian young men due to participating in a short course at her local school:

> *" ... they do know a lot and it takes you by surprise ... when you talk to them they're really studious and really studying hard and have already achieved a lot and done a lot. It makes you realise they're not that young and life-inexperienced as you have imagined."*

Another change of view, this time towards a working-class man, is also apparent for another middle-class woman, Sylvia, on her creative writing course. The growth of tolerance is mutual and enforced by the routines of the subject in terms of constructive criticism of others' work:

> *"I go to a creative writing course now, at the University of the Third Age. And there's a man there called Danny Brown. I call him Danny B and I hope they hang him in the morning. But his language is absolutely abysmal. Every other word is a swear word and to speak is awful. And I can't stand it. And when he read out one or two of his pieces I actually got up and left the room. I just ... I thought ... and one of the last pieces he wrote was actually blasphemous ... But since then he seems to have got better and the last two meetings we had. We all criticise each other's work you see, and he gave me very constructive criticism to mine. Because I had to write about the 'Gorbals' and I don't know anything about the 'Gorbals' at all. But he does, he's Scottish, very Scottish, and he gave me some quite good clues and constructive criticism about how I'd written about the 'Gorbals' and I found that very good. And he was very constructive and he wasn't swearing or anything. When he actually talks to you he's a very clever man."*

Courses with mandatory social interaction, which can be enforced within the discipline as in the case of creative writing illustrated above, but also through a professional (nursing, teaching, training to be a therapist) or access (open university, access courses) context encouraged the growth of tolerance:

> *"It made me open my eyes a lot more to how people are or how differently they can live." (Rita)*

> *"I met my first battered wife. I couldn't believe it ... " (Tina)*

> *"I suppose one thing that affected me is that I kind of believed a lot of propaganda about asylum-seekers, in that I bought the trip about it, you know, about them economic migrants rather than genuine asylum-seekers. And being here and ... there's quite a lot of asylum-seekers here and just, you know,*

> *they've become people, you know, as opposed to this tag 'asylum-seekers' and they're lovely, they're really nice." (Gareth)*

However, the ability of courses to elicit such a change in values is dependent upon educational access. Kim gives an example of how at Art School she was able to mix with individuals from many different social backgrounds which she would not believe possible given the current system of HE funding:

> *" … it was brilliant because I met people from many different backgrounds and I think now probably that's not the case because as far as I could see the only people who go to College are people who've got money. I don't see how you could manage, my sister's got children at University and it's so difficult."*

Role models

Teachers and other students can act as positive role models in terms of tolerance. A common experience for respondents educated in other countries was that their teachers were seen as a formative influence on their attitudes. Aurea adopted a communitarian viewpoint as a result of her teachers' activity. Her teachers took the time to check that every student was happy with every aspect of their learning and if there were problems, they would ask the parents in to discuss the difficulties. Aurea generalises the actions of individual teachers to general school ethos:

> *"It was also an attitude of the school, that although we were individuals, we were all part of a community. And of the country. And we could all put a little dust on the cap of the mountain."*

A tutor who represents and is an advocate for a different community can also change values for students and pupils. Faith had a deaf tutor at College:

> *"Eventually, talking to him you get another viewpoint on things because he'd grown up in a deaf world and deaf community. Again, it just opens your eyes to a whole new life and there he was teaching people and he'd coped and he'd done really well, so there's hope."*

As Faith's son was deaf, this led her to an understanding of his potential:

> *"You just sort of realise that this isn't that bad, he can still lead a normal life, there's loads of deaf people in good jobs and it's up to him. It shouldn't be a disability."*

Subject effect

Sometimes increased tolerance may emerge through the application of more general reasoning or 'open-mindedness' common to many subjects. Enid subconsciously feels that her access course has changed her values:

> *"It makes me look at people in a different way, really. I suppose I'm not so judgemental either as I was because you tend to think about the reasoning behind things more."*

However, certain subject disciplines emerged as particularly influencing tolerance. In particular humanities subjects, namely History and Sociology, were particularly instrumental in changing values. When taught well, these subjects appear to be associated with the upsetting of conventional historically- or culturally-specific categories and enable individuals to engage in wider empathy with others.

Historical understanding of inequalities and resulting tolerance may have unexpected results. One of our respondents, a young, unemployed black man in an area of economic deprivation, had discovered the writings of Malcolm X through engagement in a music course. This had given him a strong sense of black unity, which had led to his withdrawal from gang activity in the area.

Sociology can also challenge categorisations through its subject matter:

> *"Challenged my values? Yes, a hell of a lot. I was ... when I came here I was very dogmatic about my beliefs. I didn't approve of single mothers because of my own life experiences. I didn't think they could give a proper ... raise a child properly. That is, having been surrounded by a lot of single mothers, I realised isn't the case. Learning sociology and looking at issues more intently, I found really difficult at first. But obviously, when you look into things more deeper, you know, yeah, you do have to take other things into perspective." (Gareth)*

It may also lead to active debates concerning class or other forms of identity, which may challenge the views of others:

> *"Well there is a young girl on the sociology course that believed that all teenage parents get pregnant to get a council house. Being a teenage mother myself I don't share the same opinion. So, no, we had a bit of a ... she's just ... but then she was young. She was only 17, so ... there's the age difference as well. She's just ... because she's seen it on telly or heard it, it's the truth and she hasn't." (Gladys)*

Elsewhere, however, Sociology was dismissed as meaningless and pretentious. One respondent described herself as having written answers for the examination that she herself did not understand but passing nevertheless. A general conclusion would be that it is the quality of the teaching that counts, rather than the course content itself.

Resistance effects

Tolerant or accepting values are sometimes formed in opposition to the formal or informal curriculum of the educational institution. Sometimes teachers resist debate on controversial or political matters, but informal conversations or debates with teachers outside or incidental to lessons can particularly influence tolerance. For example, in Marjorie's case, she was involved with political arguments with her teachers at school. This reinforced prior views gained through informal learning:

> *"I've always been interested in the underdogs and it's got me into trouble even now ... I used to watch news and current affairs programmes which means that I probably was too old for my age watching programmes like that, but I just found it very interesting ... I still have the same views now that I did then."*

This experience may have influenced Marjorie's later entry into voluntary and then paid welfare rights work.

The tensions between early resistance and later accommodation to a more satisfactory learning situation can also act to reinforce more tolerant attitudes. For example, Alasdair had negative learning experiences at school, which meant that he left with no qualifications and poor basic skills. This negative experience was reinforced in trying to increase his basic skills, when he challenged a numeracy tutor who attempted to ridicule him:

> *"And that's what I learnt, that experience, probably the one learning experience a few years ago, you know, I'd never dream of talking to anyone like that."*

In contrast, his recent experience in a LearnDirect centre has been more satisfactory:

> *"I learnt not to talk to people like that and not to patronise people. The most important thing about the LearnDirect centre is that it's not patronising."*

The contrasting ways in which Alasdair was treated have made him adopt more tolerant attitudes in his everyday life, particularly towards his own children.

9.1.3 Age, gender and social capital

We have not so far in this report done any systematic analysis of the relationship between the various types of effect that we have identified and standard variables such as age, class and sex. In respect of social capital, however, there are some evident patterns that are worth reporting.

First, there is a clear gender distinction between formal and informal modes of civic participation. Men tend to report more participation in formal modes, whilst women's civic participation was more local and family-oriented. Learning gave them the confidence to take part in such activities – confidence even being needed to enable more than one grandmother to offer to look after the grandchildren – or to go beyond them to wider issues or a less local remit (see Danielle above on Nottingham health action). It also, as we shall see with Juliet in the next section, enabled them to validate the skills they acquired, and begin to mobilise and apply them in a wider context.

Also predictable, especially given the nature of our sample, was the age profile of those who did take part in voluntary activity. Parents of young children have such limited time that their activity tends to be limited to family and school. So it was older people who reported more in the way of voluntary activity beyond these spheres – though it would be a mistake to draw too sharp a dividing line between different forms of civic activity.

However, we can illustrate a number of themes by contrasting two people who differ on almost every variable – age, sex, class, sexuality – and examine the way they deploy their time, knowledge and skills.

Since retirement, Tina, a middle-class widow, has been involved in a number of adult education courses including economics, genealogy and exercise classes through the University of the Third Age (U3A). By her own admission she does not like getting involved with people and is a bit of a loner. Through U3A and her interest in economics, she has taken over the running of an investment club and this is her form of civic participation. Aside from the interest in economics and mathematics, she describes the benefits as:

> " *... it gets you out of the house. Which is a problem for the elderly ... And of course you speak to people. I mean these are the main advantages. You get some exercise and stop worrying about your own problems and complaints. Anything that takes you out of your four walls ... .*"

Although Tina describes one of the benefits of participation as forming friendships, she happily lived an isolated existence despite her high levels of participation in courses and groups:

> "*I go to the classes and I'll talk to anybody ... I like going out and I like meeting people on a friendly casual basis but I don't have friends. They're a pain in the neck. I enjoy mixing and going to things but I don't want to go into a real neighbourhood. I would just like a more casual acquaintanceship ... For myself (community) doesn't mean anything to me ... I don't rely on people for a social basis at all ... You see, I'm quite self-sufficient, and I don't need other people, actually, except on, as I've said to you, a casual basis.*"

For Tina, then, her course has led to civic participation, but not to an extension of her social networks or to any reciprocal involvement with others on the course. The investment club, through education, was also a source of benefit for her in terms of esteem and health:

> "*Well it does, yes, to a certain extent. Saying well you did Open University in Maths, you know. Anything to do with figures, everybody sort of gasps. I mean I had to go to a convenors' meeting and they said everybody give their name and say what group they're doing and I said I'm into stocks and shares and they said 'Oooh!' you know ... anything you do that boosts your ego gives you confidence to go and do something else, doesn't it?*"

We might have contrasted Tina with Irene – also middle-class, widowed and retired, but with a powerful inclination to social activism at almost every level, from her improving her grandchildren's education to email participation in global environmental debate. However, we have chosen Billy, who is in his early twenties and gay. He works as a mobile security inspector and volunteers for NACRO Shape, a charity for homeless young offenders, and a gay helpline. His education was a positive experience: he had a number of GCSEs and 'A' levels and is acquiring NVQ as part of his training as a security inspector. During his education, he participated in Cubs and Scouts and the ATC.

Through school, and particularly through College, Billy has developed a strong sense of internal self-efficacy. Although school was more restricted than College, he received a great deal of support from school in terms of organising and running a basketball team. College life was a major revelation for Billy:

> "*It's made me ... see that not everybody's right ... .not everybody's wrong either.. But you can prove people right or wrong yourself. You control ... this is going to sound really weird, but you control your own fate. Fate does not control you. People's influences and decisions don't have to determine what you are going to become, what you are going to do.*"

The sense of internal efficacy and agency inculcated by school and College gave Billy the confidence to participate in civic activity by volunteering to help run a gay helpline. He describes himself as wanting to "*give back to society*", and this reciprocity had been built up through positive experiences of teachers at College:

> *Interviewer: "Right, do you think that attitude has come at all from school, college environments, teaching environments ... ?"*
>
> *Billy: "In a way, yeah, it has because you see the lecturers coming in day after day, putting up with the same monotonous thing every day, year after year. And to me it was a case of 'Oh, they must be enjoying it, doing it because they want to do it' because it was a way of them putting back out what they got out of the*

> *system ... It was a good influence on me. They were like setting an example, if you like. You don't have to be like this, you can be a boring old professor or teacher. You can still enjoy yourself and at the same time put something back into it.*"

For Billy then, not only a sense of agency, but a sense of reciprocity was transferred through his college education. The agency arose through the college as an institution in which independent decisions could be made, and through the manner in which his subjects were delivered (although Sociology was also found to be a subject where students studying it reported an increased sense of insight and efficacy). The reciprocity arose not as a result of institutional or curricular factors but through observation and positive experience with the 'gifting' aspect of education – that "*... you can still enjoy yourself and put something back in.*"

In short, the effect of education on social capital is extremely diverse. We have identified a number of different types of competence that education generates, and that relate more or less directly to civic activity and social inclusion. We have illustrated various ways in which participation in learning involves people in the development or transformation of their values. Learning extends or enriches the networks within which people operate, with benefits that go beyond the personal and the social to the civic as well as the economic. Finally we have illustrated how education mediates the relationship between social capital and social variables such as age and gender. This last section has taken us into more detailed accounts of individual biographies; we develop this line of presentation more fully in Part C.

9.2 Social cohesion

Social cohesion can be conceived as a characteristic of societies as a whole, referring to ways in which their constituent groups – or communities – are linked together. Social capital can, of course, contribute towards this societal bonding where the strength and values of particular communities are such as to encourage good relations with other communities. This is often referred to in the literature as 'bridging' social capital, whose quality is such as to encourage trust and mutuality with others outside the group as well as with those within. However, not all forms of association and networking will have this effect, especially where the groups concerned are inward-looking, self-interested or intolerant of other groups.

What evidence do we have from our interviews, then, of learning contributing positively to inter-community relations and cohesion at the societal level?

Addressing this question from the evidence of individual biographies may be seen as problematic, since societal cohesion is, by definition, referring to relations in the aggregate. However, in qualitative terms there is considerable evidence from our respondents as to how learning effects on individual behaviours and attitudes may make individual contributions to wider social cohesion.

We start here by examining how learning contributes towards different types of association and civic participation, and the implications of these different types of association for social cohesion in general. In terms of its likely effects on social cohesion we can broadly classify associational activity into three kinds: personal networks; narrow interest – group participation; and society-orientated civic association. Personal networks may involve satisfying personal needs and promoting personal interests, and may also involve caring for others, but are in principle neutral as regards their effects on social cohesion more broadly. The second type, relatively narrow or exclusive group interests, may have no obvious effect on social cohesion more generally or, in some cases, they may have harmful effects on social cohesion. Membership of sports and hobby-type associations would normally fit into the neutral category, whereas membership of extremist or racist organisations would fit into the 'harmful' category. In facilitating these kinds of association learning is making no positive and direct contribution to social cohesion although it may bestow personal and group benefits. In the third type, associational activity involves civic participation which goes beyond narrow self-interest and group interest and makes a positive contribution to social cohesion. It is this third, more altruistic, type that we are concerned to analyse here.

Our interviews provide a wide range of examples of civic participation that may be seen as altruistic in nature and where the benefits are spread beyond the individual and his or her immediate circle of family and friends. In some of these cases respondents do not attribute their activity in any way to learning experience. However, there are a number of instances where respondents do mention learning as one of the factors contributing to their decision and ability to participate. This may be through the acquisition of new skills or knowledge; through the development of their values and identity; or through contacts and opportunities that have arisen in learning contexts. In some cases learning experiences have provided an immediate and direct influence; in other cases the effect is less direct or it may be delayed in time.

Rita, a 36-year-old former nursery nurse, provides an example. She was born in Bristol to Jamaican parents and was brought up there until they moved to London in 1991. Since then, and whilst working and bringing up a son who is now 17, she has been active in the community in various ways. She did voluntary work in a prison crèche for four years and took an active part in her son's early education, helping out after school and running a summer play scheme. She is now involved in volunteer work in a youth club where she mentors an 11-year-old girl. She also makes birthday cards for children in the local nursery, donates to cancer charities (some relatives died from the disease) and helps out an elderly neighbour.

Her community activities have grown out of involvement with her child's education, her familiarity with the black community in south London and her former professional role as a nursery nurse. Nevertheless, she describes specific ways in which her adult learning has contributed. After her child was born she did an NNEB course, which she enjoyed, and subsequently various other courses in First Aid and mentoring at work. These gave her confidence and skills that she could use to help other people. A counselling seminar she attended gave her more confidence in her interactions with others and taught her not to judge people. The course also taught her how to offer help to someone without seeming patronising and how to find out what to do if she didn't know how to help them. Rita's community activity is value-driven and her values have developed from diverse life experiences. However, it is clear that her adult education – and particularly her professional training – has given her knowledge skills and confidence to put her beliefs into practice.

Dale provides a rather different example of school learning having a delayed but significant impact on motivation towards involvement in altruistic activities. Dale had a very disturbed childhood and was excluded from many of his schools until he went to a special Prince of Wales Trust boarding school, which turned out to be a positive experience for him. He is currently 26 years old and unemployed in Tendring but has been quite active in community activities. He helps to raise money for charities by doing sponsored swims, parachute and bungee jumps and other stunts of various sorts. He also helps out with practical things for elderly neighbours and sometimes assists on the community housing project.

He says he learnt about giving to others from his experiences at boarding school and particularly from one adult there – the caretaker – who became an important mentor for him. Before going to the school Dale had lived in all-white areas and was, by his own admission, very racist and homophobic. He says the school cured him of this by making him mix with people from other cultures, which made him realise "*that they were not as bad as people had told me they were.*" Interestingly, his tutor who knew he had racist attitudes, deliberately placed him in a room with two black students and his experience of getting to know them seems to have been a turning point. Taking part in various volunteer activities at school also had a major impact. Building an adventure playground at school gave him the satisfaction of knowing "*he was doing something for the kids*" and put the idea of becoming a social worker into his mind. He also acted as a counsellor to two other students who had been sexually abused (which may have been rather difficult for him, one imagines), and was involved in charitable fund-raising activities at school. This made him realise it feels good to give:

> "*We were raising money ... it certainly gives you a boost. If you're doing something to help someone else out, makes you feel better about yourself.*"

He attributes his later charitable work directly to these experiences.

What is common to these examples of more altruistic forms of association is that they are frequently connected with certain kinds of values and beliefs. They are what one might term 'value-driven association'. In order to determine the impact of learning on these we must, therefore, analyse the evidence from our respondents as to how learning is shaping their values.

9.2.1 Learning, identity and citizenship

For those within our sample, civic participation, particularly including associational activities of a more altruistic kind, seems to be closely related to certain sets of values. In particular, those who were most civically active were more likely to express identities based on some kind of group affiliation and to have active or 'maximalist' notion of citizenship. They also tended to have a stronger sense of local community, either because they believed in this in principle or because it was available to them. Those whose identities were expressed primarily in relation to ethnicity were, not surprisingly, more likely to be engaged in civic activities related to ethnic communities or issues. Those whose identities focused primarily on their localities tended to be active in a variety of associational arenas. Although to some extent degrees and kinds of association were dictated by opportunity – for instance, where someone lived and for how long – for many respondents civic participation was strongly value-driven. What marks out those who were highly civically active from those who were not is often, though not exclusively, to do with fundamental beliefs and value orientations. What role does learning play, then, in the development of this kind of 'altruistic' or 'inclusive' civic consciousness? How does learning promote the development of the kind of 'bridging' social capital that forms the basis of social cohesion?

We have already shown how frequently experiences of adult learning are associated by respondents with increases in level of tolerance and intercultural understanding. This does not, of course, invariably lead to civic activism – indeed it may often take a more passive or quietistic form. However, it may well be seen as significant in that it provides a necessary, if not sufficient, condition for active citizenship. We have also seen numerous examples of how particular learning experiences have led directly or indirectly to community involvements of one sort or another. These have included, *inter alia*:

- individual teachers or mentors in learning situations providing positive role models and sets of values that have an impact on individual learners values, either immediately or later (as with Dale);

- socially mixed learning environments leading to increased cultural awareness and social concern;

- collaborative learning activities fostering the desire in a learner to work cooperatively;

- practical activities (Dale making an adventure playground) leading the learner to a sense of self-efficacy and pride in doing something useful to others;

- volunteering at school leading to adult volunteering;

- learning about concepts (e.g. in Politics, Sociology or Psychology) which help learners to articulate and act on their beliefs (Digby honing his political beliefs and skills);

- learning skills that become useful resources in civic participation (Danielle and her administrative skills);

- learning experiences that increase social confidence and encourage individuals to feel that they can help others;

- adult education providing opportunities and contacts that enable new involvements in the community.

These observations of types of impact are, of course, very diverse and cannot easily be summed in a way that would provide a basis for a full explanation of how learning contributes towards social cohesion. At the most we can probably only identify here certain considerations that seem of particular importance on the basis of our interviews.

The first point is that the individual's propensity towards more altruistic forms of civic association and cooperation depends on individual resources *and* individual values *and* opportunities. We have many examples of individuals who have developed the resources through learning that would enable them to be civically active, but who have not been motivated or had the opportunity to be so. There are also examples from our fieldwork of individuals who have the motivation and values for participation but who appear to be constrained by their lack of opportunities and resources. Lack of skills and resources may be more important factors constraining association generally, but in terms of the engagement in the more altruistic forms of association lack of motivation (in terms of values and identity) and lack of opportunity would seem to provide the major hindrance.

The second point is that value and identity formation is a complex process where learning impacts result from both cognitive and affective processes. The affective process seems to be particularly important and is dependent on a whole learning environment. Our accounts of how learning has shaped identity and values place particular stress on:

- the influence of individual mentors and peer groups;

- the impact of various extra-curricular activities and learning experiences;

- the role of actual voluntary involvements as part of the learning process.

Put more generally, value and identity formation are all highly dependent on learning context. From the evidence of our interviews, it would seem that adult education institutions, and further education colleges in particular, have certain characteristics that are highly favourable to effecting shifts in adult values and identities in ways that promote civic engagement. Our respondents frequently noted such changes occurring as a result of further education, whereas there were relatively few accounts of schools having such an impact. Given the way in which memory may alter perceptions of childhood experience it would be unjustified to conclude that schools have little effect in this regard. Equally, given that our adult learners were voluntary participants, and thus a selective sample, it would also be unjustified to conclude that colleges are more effective agents of civic socialisation than schools. However, we would be justified in concluding here, at least, that the learning context of FE has certain characteristics that are conducive to the promotion of social cohesion. Amongst those mentioned in this context by our respondents are the voluntary nature of attendance, the relatively 'adult' atmosphere, the cultural and social heterogeneity on the college body, and the 'customisation' of learning programmes to individual values and aspirations.

The third, and perhaps most important, point is that learning impacts on civic consciousness and engagement are highly dependent on external contexts. The final section here focuses on the significance of time and place.

9.2.2 The importance of time and place

Formal learning is clearly only one (although an important one) amongst a number of factors that shape individual identities and values and lead towards civically aware behaviour. In as much as learning does have this effect, it is through a process that is embedded in particular contexts both within and beyond the learning site. Amongst the most important of these contexts are time and place.

Interviewees cited a variety of factors that had influenced their values and laid the basis for their civic behaviour. Many attributed their values to the influence of the family and to life experiences in general. Rather few by comparison cited their schools as being important influences. Where formal learning experiences – typically of adult education – were described as influential, this was often as one of several influential factors and, furthermore, one whose influence was intimately related to other causes. Learning experiences, in other words, worked alongside and in conjunction with other influences. So, for instance, learning in colleges helped many respondents to articulate (through conceptual understanding) and put into practice (through acquired skills) beliefs they had already acquired from elsewhere. Part of the significance of the adult learning episode was, precisely, that it related to other aspects of development, both reinforcing and enabling nascent patterns of civic behaviour.

In many of the accounts of life pathways into civic engagement, time and place were highly significant. Time was important in as much as many individuals related their values acquisition to very specific times in their lives and to the historical values of that period that they experienced through family and life experience. For instance, Gerald, who had a long history of civic activity, says that education had helped to broaden his horizons, but attributed his sense of civic responsibility mostly to the wartime environment of his childhood, and his experience of national service in early adulthood. Being a good citizen to him means:

> *"we should all live and work together and we should respect each others' views. ... Community to me I suppose is like bees in a beehive, all working together for a common objective. I'm very much a co-operator both in theory and in practice and I think that if all of us were to cooperate more then I think that many of the problems that we face in society would not be there."*

He feels this spirit of cooperation was a feature of the post-war world he grew up in and that community has disappeared now in cities.

Gerald's account of post-war socialisation in the UK echoes that of the New Deal generation in the USA, which Putnam (2000) claims represented the high water mark of social capital in that country. Many other interviews evoke the importance of the cultural ambience that frames formative life periods, and are testimony to the significance of the 'period effect'. Certainly, notions of 'community' were highly generational in our sample, with older respondents being more likely to see the ideal of community in locality and the younger respondents more likely to relate to communities of interest and lifestyle whether local or distributed.

Regional effects and local contexts are also very significant in our accounts. This is not just a matter of Euro-sceptic views being rather prevalent in the Tendring area. Nor is it simply, and predictably, that the sense of ethnic community is more prevalent and geographic community more elusive for our London respondents while the opposite applies to those in Cotgrave. More importantly, it is a question of the social context being central to the way in which learning has its effects on the values and identities of individuals. This was vividly illustrated in the case of Digby.

Digby is a former miner now working as a site manager for a Fresh Start school. He was brought up in a working-class Labour family in the North East, with six siblings, and had no choice, he says, but to go down the pit when leaving school at 15. He was a local NUM strike activist during the 1983/4 strike. Like others in the region he received no strike pay so he became active in setting up food kitchens and in international fund-raising for strikers' families in Belgium, Sweden, Minsk and Detroit. He also set up a small business selling miners' artefacts to raise money for the families. After the strike he went back to work above ground at the colliery but was cold-shouldered by the other miners (from the rival union) and subsequently left the mine to work in a mental hospital, where he worked his way up to assistant manager. Various other jobs as professional carer led him finally to his current post as manager of a Fresh Start school.

Digby has always been active in the community, even apart from his local trade union work. He became a governor of his daughter's school because it was on special measures and in trouble and he wanted to do something about it. He was later made Chair of Governors and went down to London to petition – successfully – for Fresh

Start funding. He was also on the executive board of an Education Action Zone and did voluntary work for a youth centre, which is run by local people and has had national recognition for its work. He used to work for the Labour Party and for one of the councillors.

Digby's various life contexts have been hugely influential in shaping his political values from his period in the NUM onwards. His early school experience in the North East was not very positive and he describes bullying and "*sadistic*" treatment from some of the teachers. He says he enjoyed it nevertheless and was inspired by one particular teacher, but he didn't learn much except how to "*fight and smoke*". He left without any qualifications. Schooling made little contribution to his community commitment he says, except negatively, in that in retrospect it made him want to do something to improve schools for his children. On the other hand, adult education courses with the NUM, including residentials, were a revelation to him, and helped him go on to get a diploma in politics and economics from Nottingham University. These courses were not the source of his values, and in fact arose out of his existing political commitments, but they helped him to shape and articulate his views and gave him the skills for his later work in the community.

What is striking about Digby is his enormous commitment to the community, which is the source of his values and the object of his civic work. It was his community (the pit, the NUM, and the village are inseparable in his account) that gave him the opportunity to take the courses that transformed his life. What motivates his civic activity is the desire to give others in his community the learning opportunities that his community gave him:

> "*I've got a chance to educate myself and I think I'm trying to give other people exactly the same chance.*"

Digby's story is significant because he describes very clearly the ways in which his adult learning experiences provided him with the tools and opportunities to extend his community involvements. His adult learning experiences gave him a new knowledge base and conceptual framework for articulating his beliefs. It provided him with the skills, qualifications and networks that would allow him to restart his career in a field that gave expression to his civic-minded values. It also gave him the benchmarks for his aspirations of achieving better education for his community and thus the motivation for his community activism.

What is equally significant here, though, is the converse. The 'community' provided him with his initial values and with opportunities to learn the things that he later employed as a community activist. His learning arose out of his community involvement and was consistent with it, and the compatibility of the two is clearly a central aspect of the story of successful adult learning that he tells. It is interesting to speculate whether Digby would have engaged in learning in the same way, and whether his learning would have had similar effects, had there not been the NUM connection, and had available learning opportunities pointed only towards an evening class in, say, 'A' level Politics in a neighbouring town. Would he have taken the course? Would it have meant so much to him? Would it have propelled him in the same way to his future paid and voluntary work in the community? The story might have had a different ending.

Digby's story is unusual in the sheer level of his community commitment and, perhaps, in the graphic way he tells it. However, the central message that we draw from it could have been drawn from a number of accounts by individuals, some of whom have different political persuasions. Learning can have significant impacts on altruistic behaviour where core values and beliefs are engaged and where the learning context and external environment are mutually supported and 'in tune'.

The main conclusion that we draw from this is that adult learning can be a powerful force for social cohesion, particularly where its forms and contents relate to the surrounding communities and the lives of people living there. Providing individuals with the skills and resources to engage in their communities in positive ways is one important task. However, equally important, and perhaps more difficult, is to stimulate the attitudes and values that motivate people to act in socially cooperative ways. Building social cohesion requires initiatives in learning institutions and communities that work together.

PART C: Individual case studies

10. Interactions

We now go on to present some more detailed case studies, giving the overall individual profiles, which cannot be understood from the quotations above. In analysing the benefits of learning through these individual biographies, we are particularly concerned to explore the complex interactions between the various domains of public and private life. Sometimes there are relatively simple and direct connections to be made between a specific learning episode and a defined benefit – for example, where participation leads directly to a specific and observable improvement in health. More often, the effect is diffused over a number of domains which themselves interact, as when participation enables the learner to access a social network, which itself brings benefits irrespective of the content of the learning. Almost any permutation of two or more areas is a meaningful relationship to explore. Indeed permutations of more than two are also potentially fruitful. However, the interactions are so complex that we are unlikely to aspire to bring them all into a single equation with numerical values assigned to each interrelationship. Qualitative investigation of dyadic or triangular relationships is a more likely path. (This is emphatically not to privilege qualitative over quantitative analysis – see Schuller & Bynner, 2001.)

The individual diagrams that accompany the case studies are simple maps of the pathways and interconnections given to us in the personal accounts. But they are also included as a contribution to methodological debate. We have found it extremely helpful to attempt to pull together the findings in this diagrammatic form, for a number of reasons:

- in developing our own individual analyses;
- in sharing these with colleagues and validating each others' analyses;
- in presenting the results to others.

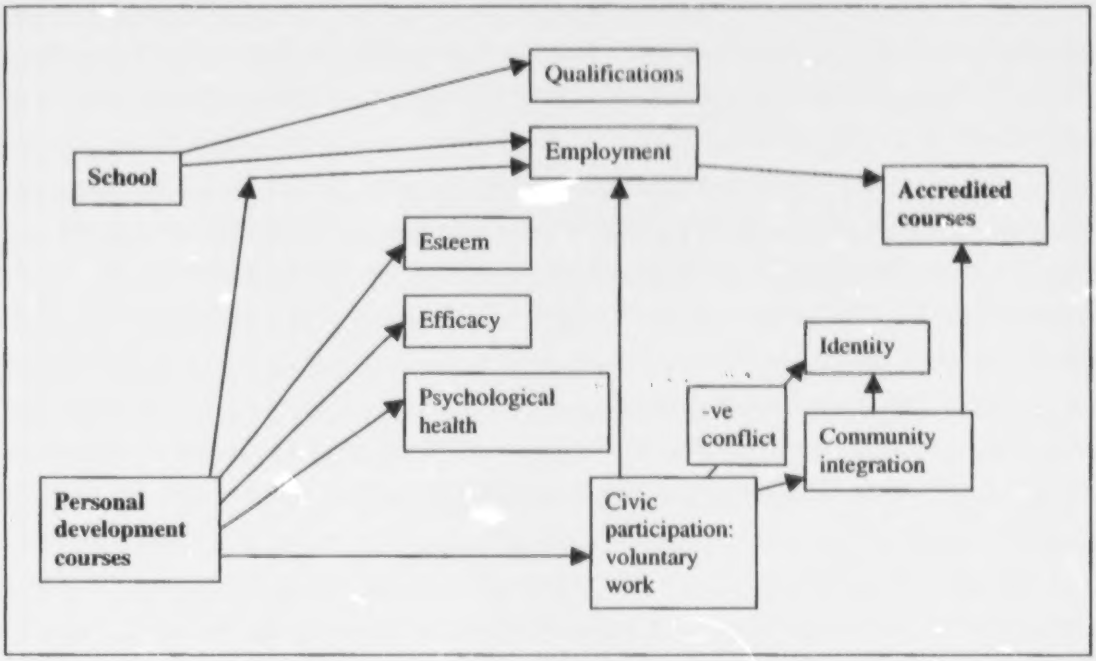
They are therefore included as a modest contribution to capacity-building, since we believe that they offer a useful and practical way of managing evidence, complementary to verbal and of course quantitative analysis.

In this section we look at the interactions between health, family and civic participation effects through three different biographies. In the following section we look particularly at issues in relation to communication and (inter)dependence.

10.1 Juliet

Juliet is white, 50 years old and has been married for 29 years. She has two children, aged 10 and 14. She has worked as a library assistant but having been at home with her children from 1979 to 1987 has undertaken courses/voluntary work. Her voluntary work in health led to employment as a project worker in the Nottingham Health Action Zone.

Figure 4: Juliet


Qualifications
School
Employment
Accredited courses
Esteem
Efficacy
Identity
Psychological health
-ve conflict
Community integration
Personal development courses
Civic participation: voluntary work

Juliet's school experience was positive and after CSEs she went on to 'A' levels, which she considers in retrospect to be a mistake, as they were too demanding for her. Through employment she gained a library assistant's certificate. She also has a certificate in 'playgroup'. In recent years, she has undertaken a number of courses such as 'make your life experience count', 'women's health' and 'counselling'. She is currently studying for the Community Development Award, which is largely APL (Accreditation of Prior Learning).

Juliet's learning trajectory has involved a major juggling act in respect of her personal identity. As a working-class mother, her primary identity was for many years as a child-rearer. She has undertaken a number of WEA courses, straddling the boundaries between personal development and community development. These have led both to a snowballing involvement in voluntary activities, and to employment in a Health Action Zone. Paid and unpaid work are inextricably interrelated, as are learning and doing. They feed off and lead to each other. But whereas being a mother is in her social milieu an acceptable form of unpaid work, getting involved in voluntary activity to the extent she has is, as she describes it, less easily acceptable, and she ran the risk of being labelled a middle-class do-gooder; in this milieu, work in the public sphere ought usually to be remunerated. So there have been risks in her learning. She has not been deterred by this but she also points out how voluntary work and the learning that goes with it (as part of the work or through the training that accompanies it) also open up opportunities for paid employment:

> *" … others were seeing it, 'Why are you giving all this to the community and not being paid?' So I must be the middle-class do-gooder because I didn't have to work and I was old and I've got the grey hair and so it was the perception. What I've then turned around is people's perception that I did it because I cared for the community and I'm in a very lucky position that I had the time to do it. But what's really good is there's a lot more people now that are thinking, well yes, volunteering is fantastic. It's a learning opportunity, the skills are recognised, the value, and now they're doing a lot more and they're moving on."*

Juliet's personal development has brought about increased self-confidence and the ability to make choices. These manifest themselves in her enhanced autonomy and the confidence to fashion her own combination of domestic, paid and voluntary activity. But the interrelationships go further. She speaks of being able to think through her own values and goals. These are quintessentially personal outcomes, but ones that are also enabling her to plan a career. She exemplifies the way in which volunteering is both a learning process itself and enables people to move on to other recognised activities. Moreover her commitment to the community has combined with her learning on the community regeneration course to enable her to offer constructive critiques of the policies of the local council (although we cannot independently check on the quality or efficacy of these):

> *Juliet: "Well, it was just the fact that you could solve people's problems. We really got ourselves so geared up that we could go off for an hour and sort out the Borough Council and it was a real good learning curve to say that we'd got those skills and hadn't realised. To actually have a problem there and with all the experience we've had through the voluntary sector is to say yes, we know, because it wasn't a blank sheet. If we'd sat there and thought 'how do we know that?' But it's because we're working in a community and we could relate to it. You then thought, yes, we can sort it out."*
>
> *Interviewer: "And is it important to get a certificate at the end of it?"*
>
> *Juliet: "I think it is for work purposes … "*

The learning has its costs. She recalls leaving the counselling course every week crying internally because of the intensity of the personal challenge that it posed to her values. In her social world she has had to cope with the perceived criticism – however this may or may not have been articulated – of self-indulgence, of her relatively privileged position of not having to do paid work. On the other hand, meeting both these kinds of challenge has been a major factor in her growth.

Juliet offers some trenchant criticism of the pressure to achieve formal academic qualifications. This was already the case in her initial education, where she was put in to do 'A' levels which she feels were beyond her capabilities at the time. And she does not wish to put at risk the empowerment and skill she currently feels by using it to follow a conventional academic pathway. Thus she describes as her biggest achievement the confidence to have a Caesarean whilst remaining conscious:

> *"You get two surgeons with two knives but you're awake for it. That was a real learning situation. But you can't get a degree for that."*

The content of Juliet's learning has been strongly, even intensely, focused on personal and psychological issues. Yet this does not mean that it has had an effect only on her individual growth. Her mix of learning and community activity has enabled her to commit herself to bringing up her family – presumably to their benefit – without feeling personally confined by this role. She has used her learning to fashion her individual combination of different forms of work, each of them feeding off each other. The mix has reinforced her personal identity and her psychological well-being. And this in turn has increased her employability, though not necessarily her level of formal qualification. The relationship between human and social capital is not straightforward, even where it is demonstrably positive.

10.2 Kali

Kali's family is from Pakistan. She grew up in Nottingham, and was married by arrangement at the age of 18 or 19. A year later, she had the first of her three children. The children were aged 8, 11 and 14 at the time of the interview. Kali has not worked very often in paid employment. Her husband runs a restaurant and she has helped him with finances, accounts and reception work. Since all three of her children went to school, she has started working on a project in Nottingham that supports parents at school.

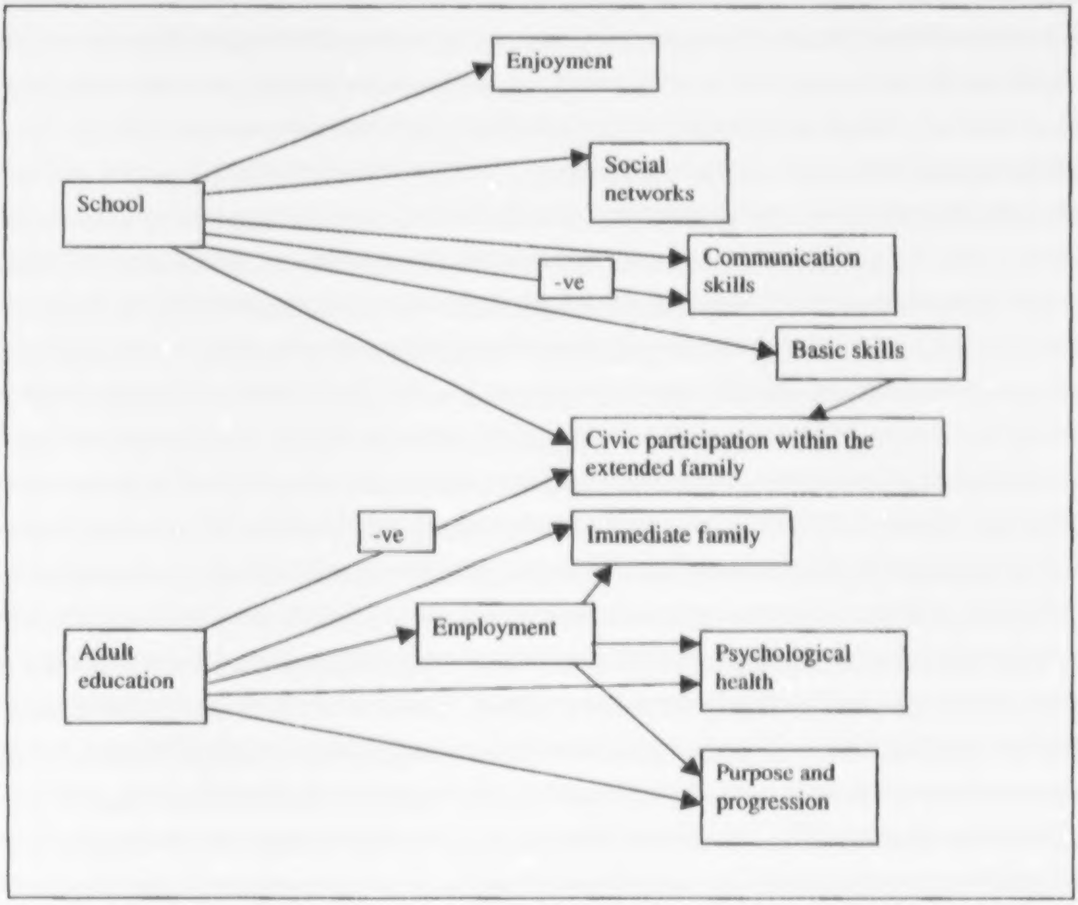
Kali was educated in this country in state provision – a mixed primary school and an all girls secondary school. She started sixth-form college but left to get married. Neither her own parents nor the family that she married into saw her education as important in terms of career development because it was anticipated that she would marry and look after a family. After having children, Kali started to attend courses at the local college and this has led to employment that incorporates education as part of it. The combination of employment and education since having children has had an enormous impact upon her life.

Kali is one of the most straightforward cases of education helping someone to make the transition from full-time childcare. When her children were all old enough to be at school, this left a major gap in her life. Participation in education has given her purpose and structure. It has positively affected her personal identity and psychological health:

> *"[Before participating in education] Waking up in the morning ... you didn't have a schedule ... It was like dropping the children off but then coming back ...*

> *You don't have to do the Hoover because I'm in all day anyway … There is no timetable, and I found myself not really motivating myself and I knew I could do better. … Going into school and getting involved in school activities, you know, it kind of made you realise like, you could do something … paid."*

Figure 5: Kali


Enjoyment
Social networks
School
Communication skills
-ve
Basic skills
Civic participation within the extended family
-ve
Immediate family
Employment
Adult education
Psychological health
Purpose and progression

It has simultaneously changed her relationship with her children and her husband. Because of the skills and confidence she has gained, she is able to offer positive support to the former in their education (and to offer a role model to her daughter), even though she also has less time to devote to them because of her work and studying, and to achieve a better balance in sharing domestic and family responsibilities with her husband.

> "*More of the weight's come back onto him because I've got a job now, so, you know, he's had to kind of get up and pull his socks up a bit more, and push his weight around the house a bit as well. … With me moving up in my work, he's kind of got more proud of me and he's accepted it, and, you know, he really*

> *does help now, you know. He'll pick the children up, whereas before I used to pick them up from the school.*"

Kali refers to the job as making all the difference, but she obtained the job through her participation in classes – a simple example of an educational effect mediated through employment.

Her development has therefore led to a mutually satisfactory (as reported by her) reorganisation of the domestic division of labour. But complementing this has been her ability to help her husband in his work running a restaurant, for instance by using her IT skills (in which she has proudly gained certificates and a diploma) to design the menus. So the family has gained as an economic as well as a social unit.

On the other hand, this process of modernisation has had its impact on the wider family. Previously, Kali used to be almost at the beck and call of a range of relatives, putting her language skills at their service. Now she no longer has the time for this, and has the self-confidence to refuse to be so much at their beck and call:

> "*I always used to do so many things for the family, you know, like aunties and uncles, who couldn't read or write. Filling forms in and things like that, or writing letters, or accompanying them to, you know, to some kind of meeting … to the Benefit Agency, and you obviously need that knowledge to talk.*"

This she no longer does, partly for time reasons, being busy with her own affairs, and partly because she feels less tightly tied by obligations. There is therefore something of a tension between the benefits to the immediate family, and the potential loss to the traditional extended family of Kali's culture. The wider costs of education's role in modernisation have been noted elsewhere (for example in relation to the peasant region of Campecho in Portugal; see Fragoso, 2001). But the deflection of energy, time and skill has not only been inward to the nuclear family. Kali's involvement in the parent support project means that she is supporting other parents with children at school. As part of her work in this project she is learning about the history of the project and the local networks within which it operates. This has given her a 'broader picture' of her environment. Although she does not say so, it may in so doing also have given her a changed understanding of community, and the relationship between family and community.

There is, not surprisingly, a multiplier effect. Kali offers the parents in the project her own experience as encouragement to them to enrol in education, stressing to them that they will not have to be tested. Her own views on adults' ability to learn have changed, and she can convey this to others.

Kali's case illustrates the effect of education in helping someone to cope both with life course change and social change (see Hareven, 1992). She had come to a point in her life – common to women from many different cultures and walks of life – when a major change in their parental role faces them with challenges that they may need help in meeting. At the same time, historical changes in family structures within a multicultural context generated tensions at different levels (those of the wider family and of her personal marital relationship) which she seems to have been able to resolve. The link between her immediate family and the community has been strengthened by her participation, albeit at the possible expense of the wider family. This generational impact will carry on through to her own children, who will have her example in front of them, and is already impacting on other parents. We can only speculate on what might have happened within her family, both nuclear and extended, if she had not had access to learning opportunities to cope with both these types of change.

10.3 Lydia

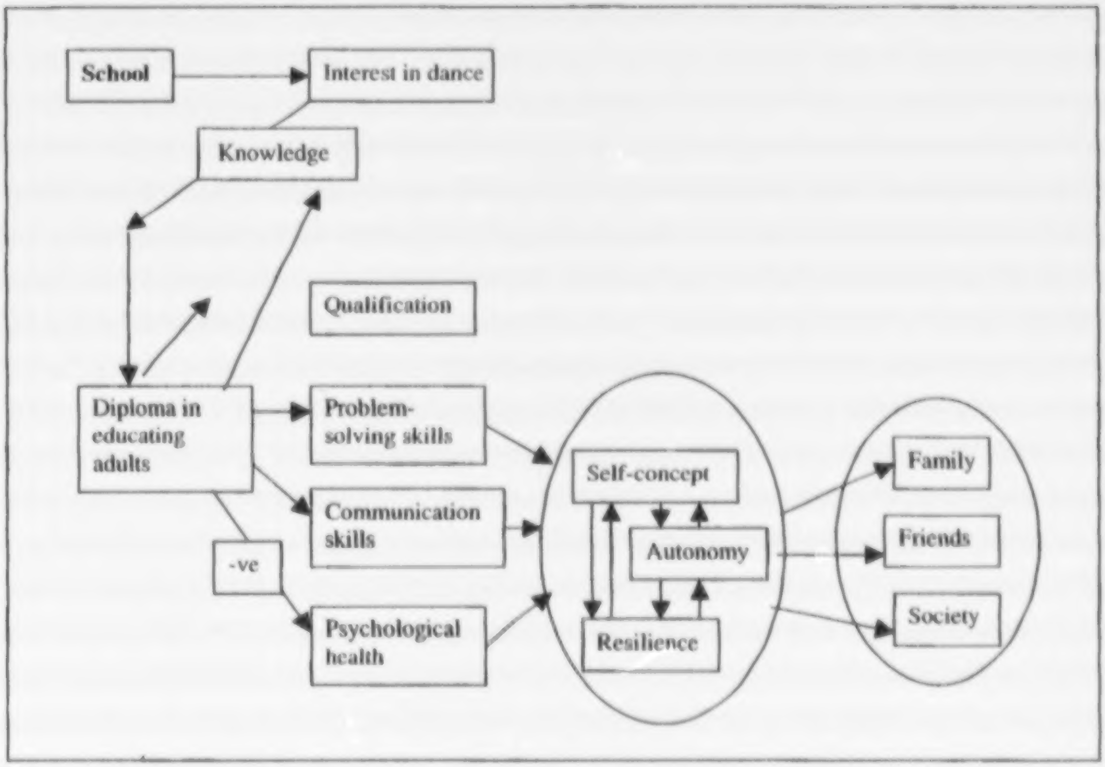
Lydia is a professional dance teacher of Greek origin. She organises a programme of study for dancers, which involves coordinating the work of a number of tutors. She is married with two boys (aged 14 and 5). She speaks with passion about dancing, learning and life in general.

Lydia's secondary schooling was at a huge 1300-strong all-girls comprehensive in Islington – "*pretty awful, because I was surrounded by girls who basically just wanted to bunk off the whole time.*" It followed a primary education that had been rather disjointed because of parental divorce. She had a lot of traditional support from her Greek background and mother but her mother was also on antidepressants. After leaving school Lydia did three years' very intensive dance training, and many more classes. But she regards her whole life as learning – and makes a pretty good case for it. Her current education is a Diploma in Teaching and Learning in Adult Education.

The course, around which her account is mainly built, is designed to enhance her skills as an adult educator (in her case as a coordinator and trainer of dance teachers). It has been a marked success, professionally and personally. One aspect of this success links closely to Juliet's experience, since the course served to validate Lydia's existing competencies as well as to enhance them. The effect was powerful:

> "*… it formalises my experience because I've been teaching for about 15 years and as a dancer or movement person teaching, there's nothing out there really that tied in with the way that I teach or the work that I do ... I thought no, I can't carry on like this because I do need to progress forwards in some way where my teaching is recognised … Though I have my beliefs and my values I thought there's something else behind all this and of course there was. There's a world of information that within the first lesson I walked away transformed.*"

Figure 6: Lydia


School
Interest in dance
Knowledge
Qualification
Diploma in educating adults
Problem-solving skills
Communication skills
-ve
Psychological health
Self-concept
Autonomy
Resilience
Family
Friends
Society

Lydia speaks at some length on the positive impact her learning has had on her ability to organise and motivate her corps of dance teachers. The interesting issue here, as we consider the links between different outcomes, is the way this has spilled over into her personal and family life. Specifically, it has taught her the value of compromise and tolerance. She adds more detail on how what she has learnt has enhanced her parenting skills, both in day-to-day communication with her children and husband and in solving particular problems, for example in relation to the children's education. Yet the learning has not been without its risks. Lydia refers to one module on the course as having been particularly likely to cause "*brain damage*". She found the demands of the course exacting, as she was trying to combine the roles of student and professional course director at the same time, with her family life in addition. If we apply the human capital approach in its dry sense to the distinctly undesiccated field of dancing, Lydia invested heavily in her own training and development and that investment might well have been lost or even had negative returns, in terms of professional career, personal confidence and even family life. Education can be a risk, psychologically as well as economically, and Lydia describes how aware she became of the risks that she was taking, personally as well as professionally.

Unlike Juliet and Kali, Lydia reports no involvement in organised forms of civic engagement. On some conventional measures of social capital she does not register. Yet her case illustrates the way in which personal development of a holistic kind runs across different spheres of life. The skills that she has developed in relation to her occupation as a manager of dance training have certainly impacted upon other domains, so that she can offer a positive problem-solving approach.

As is evident even from the sketch provided here, Lydia is self-consciously holistic in her approach to life. It would be difficult to imagine her compartmentalising her activities such that her family life would not be affected if her dance training were not going well. As far as the effects of education is concerned this obviously raises the stakes. On the one hand it multiplies the positive impact; on the other, it increases the risk of damage where the learning does not turn out well. Happily, in Lydia's case, the risk has paid off handsomely.

10.4 Conclusions

The three women come from different backgrounds and have very different learning trajectories. What can we learn from them? At a general level their cases demonstrate the salience of health issues, especially mental or psychological health. At a time when there is substantial public debate on health spending, the relevance of learning opportunities to health outcomes is very high. If one third of GPs' time is taken up with mental health issues, then services that prevent, mitigate or resolve these should be looked at seriously (for an interesting initiative, see James, 2001). Our data generally show how pervasive health issues are, without usually being presented to doctors or other professionals. The health-maintaining function of learning is almost by definition hard to identify systematically, but is fundamental.

The effects of learning on family lives can be very strong. Generally our evidence is that they are highly positive, primarily but by no means solely in influencing the involvement of parents in their children's education. In other words, the general increase in cultural capital enhances the next generation's human capital. But the process is not always straightforward; affecting one part of the family has effects on other parts, especially where there are quite complex family structures, as Kali's case illustrates.

Thirdly, we should not look only to the more obvious forms of civic participation in order to measure social capital. Juliet's account of her own involvement in voluntary organisations is very valuable for us, because it shows such a direct link between organised learning and organised civic activity. But the contribution Lydia is able to make via her enhanced organisational and problem-solving abilities may count equally, even though she does not appear to be involved in specific civic activity.

Transferability of skills and expertise emerges strongly in all three accounts. Often self-esteem is the motor, enabling people to perform in a variety of spheres. But it is clear that practical competences often go well beyond the course or the activity through which they are acquired. This raises nitty-gritty questions about how such competences are to be developed through curriculum design and pedagogical approaches, and acknowledged without choking them off through overformalised assessment processes.

Finally, the critical importance of students being guided towards the right type of course at the right level is confirmed. We hear from many stories the deterrent, even destructive, effects of people being placed in classes where the demands made on them could not be met. These effects, from school or beyond, can be extraordinarily long-lasting. Pastoral support and teaching styles that build up cooperation between students are crucial in fostering confidence, especially in those whose initial experience of education was poor.

11. Change and communication: dependence, independence and interdependence

Lydia's case provides a link to another set of outcomes, which we also illustrate through the case of Gareth, to do with dependence, independence and interdependence, and how a reasonable balance is achieved between these in lives and social contexts full of change and turbulence. These outcomes are not ones that we specified in our original model; they have emerged from the accounts given to us. They do, however, intersect with several of the 'headline' outcomes.

11.1 Gareth

We turn now to Gareth, who brings very different insights into the issue of dependence and interdependence. The benefits of learning for him are summed up in one rather dramatic quotation:

> *"I'm not that junkie who skulks around in the middle of the night, um, who doesn't have consideration for other people. I can walk out of the door and hold my head high."*

Gareth's schooling was distinctly unsuccessful. He rebelled totally against his school's ethos. This led to him being abused by a private tutor hired to attempt to redeem his poor school performance. Following this he went to college in order to attempt some qualifications but the main outcome of this period was to fashion his entry into the drug culture. College was physically the place to get drugs, and socially the location of a network of drug users, launching him on a serious drugs career, which developed in parallel with a lucrative career as a self-taught professional photographer. This is a clear example of a strongly negative nexus between learning and social networks, as access to the college turned into something very different.

As time went on Gareth was earning large sums and spending massively on ecstasy and cocaine. The community within which Gareth then functioned was extremely powerful but, as he now sees it, illusory:

> *Interviewer: "So how does the community you're a part of now compare to those communities?"*
>
> *Gareth: "Well, it's better in that it's real, you know. The trouble with a community based on drugs is that if you take the drugs away, there's no community there. The community is the shared experience, rather than an actual community, you know. You were all living in the same drug experience, but that's not a real community."*

Gareth describes himself then as "*suicidal without the courage to commit suicide*". Since he gave up drugs and returned to college his confidence has gone through the roof, and being part of a student community is part of that. This extends beyond students and the college itself, so that the pub across from the college where they go for a drink after class becomes itself a part of the college community in his eyes. In addition to regaining the will to live he can learn from others, and even enable others to learn:

> *"I can talk to people. I can come and do an interview like this without being frightened. Um ... how else? My ability ... to speak openly in class, without being worried if I look foolish, or if ... you know what I mean. It doesn't bother me, because I know I'm not. And ... I ... every class I've been in the teachers have all said, you know 'it's really good having you in the class because it allows other people to talk openly about things ... in general it allows people to be open themselves'."*

His own views have changed substantially as a result of the course to a more liberal position, specifically, as he tells it, in relation to single mothers and asylum-seekers. More importantly, he feels he has the ability to think things through for himself, to form his own informed opinion on social and political issues – even when this brings him into conflict with a sociology lecturer who in his view was promoting a Marxist agenda and who labelled him a right-wing demagogue. His education has combined with his rehabilitation and counselling to give him both a sense of independence, where he no longer feels the need to be perfect, and of interdependence, where he feels associated with others, at college and at home:

> *"I've incredibly strong relations with my neighbours ... we almost have one flat that's shared between us. Which is really nice – she's married with two kids, three kids. But having been isolated for six years, I still do find building relationships quite difficult. Casual acquaintances I can cope with, but strong ... strong relationships I find still difficult."*

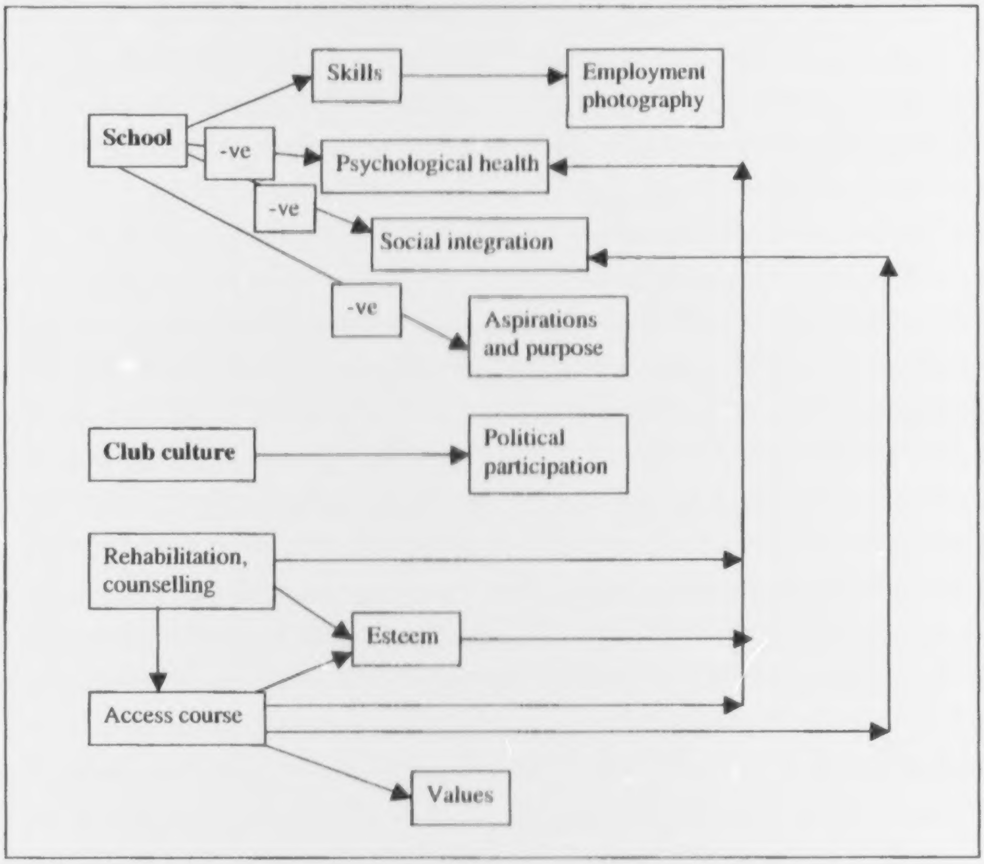
Gareth has helped his neighbour with difficulties with her husband and also acted as a student spokesman for others in his class, but he sees counselling rather than his course as influencing these outcomes:

> *"It's a direct result of me ... I would say ... it's not a direct result of being on the course, no. It's a direct result of many years of counselling having finally coming to some sort of fruition."*

In his case, the counselling has laid the foundations for his subsequent growth, with education then providing the forum and channel through which he has been able to exercise autonomy. He attributes more of his personal transformation to the former, but without the latter, it is questionable whether that would have been consolidated and built upon – although we can never know. Whatever the mix of in- and inter-dependence, they contrast strikingly with his former dependence.

What does Gareth's case tell us? First, communities – and the social capital they generate – can be good or bad or both (it is worth noting that the clubbing community to which he belonged in his cocaine-consuming days also led him to some political involvement in Anti-Nazi League activities on behalf of his gay friends). Secondly, education can have a seriously redemptive function, especially for those who have been involved in some form of abuse or self-abuse, but who are not necessarily at the bottom of society. It provides a future perspective, to complement and capitalise upon the immediate preserving and healing functions of counselling or other treatments. In doing so it makes an impact on health in an individually significant way that is hard to capture in statistical analyses. The target groups for intervention might not be evident candidates, where for example they are high-earning and apparently freewheeling, but education may have a particular impact where it enables people to convert their energies into other channels with more sustainable lifestyles. Education should therefore be seen as a significant option by practitioners who work outside the education service, such as counsellors or drug rehabilitation workers (as the innovative Prescribing for Learning project illustrates), especially where mental health is concerned. Thirdly, any such conversion is likely to have to combine highly personalised services with collective educational provision that offers an alternative community.

Figure 7: Gareth


School
Skills
Employment photography
-ve
Psychological health
-ve
Social integration
-ve
Aspirations and purpose
Club culture
Political participation
Rehabilitation, counselling
Esteem
Access course
Values

Lydia and Gareth offer very contrasting cases. But they are united at least in the way their accounts describe growth through education leading them to a capacity to cope with change, and generating a shift in the balance between dependence, independence and interdependence. In their different worlds, enhanced independence is central to social cohesion as they both quite consciously come to acknowledge the way in which their lives and their identities are interwoven with those of others. Fundamental to this interdependence is the way they refer to their improved communicative competence, by which is meant their ability to gather information and to articulate their own views; but also their capacity to empathise with others so that the communication is not only two-way but also sometimes implicit. The contribution of their various forms of learning – formal and informal – illustrates a fundamental way in which learning strengthens social cohesion.

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PART D: Recapitulation and policy conclusions

12. Conclusions

This report presents results from over 140 biographical interviews carried out with adults of very different ages and backgrounds, engaged in diverse forms of learning in three different areas of England. This final section recapitulates the report's main content, and presents a set of policy conclusions.

12.1 Conceptual and methodological issues

Analysing the wider benefits of learning presents significant conceptual and methodological challenges. As well as presenting empirical results, this report offers outcomes from the work we did in developing our analytical approach to the fieldwork. This covers both our preparatory and piloting work, and the execution of the main body of the research.

First, we constructed a simple *analytical triangle* around three basic concepts: human capital, social capital and personal identity (Figure 1, p. 10). The triangle's three sides represent different dimensions – roughly speaking, the socio-economic, the socio-psychological and what might be called the psycho-economic. Within the triangle we placed the fields we are specifically interested in, such as health or family life. The framework helps us to trace the complex sets of interactions that exist between the different fields. We emphasise that the variables identified can be both final and intermediate – in other words, they can emerge as an effect of learning or as a mediating factor in a different causal chain. We also emphasise that the framework is to be seen dynamically; it is available, as it were, for wider use with other variables, and we shall ourselves modify it in subsequent work.

A second outcome of this kind, emerging from the fieldwork itself, is a simple general *matrix* for plotting the *effects of learning* (Figure 2, p. 12). One dimension runs from the *individual to the collective*, the other from *transforming to sustaining*. This generates a typology of effects that we have found to be extremely fruitful, and could be of wider application. In particular, the sustaining function of learning emerged as immensely important, in ways that are very hard to demonstrate other than through in-depth study. This might be called the counterfactual problem, in that we may only learn the full impact of education once it is removed. One of our strongest findings is that involvement in learning enables people to sustain the quality of their personal lives or their communities, through acute problems or more routinely.

We used the individual–collective dimension to map out other parts of the work, notably in relation to *self-confidence*. Self-confidence, and cognate notions such as self-esteem or self-efficacy, are very widely reported effects of education; we set out a spectrum of the different ways in which such an outcome manifests itself.

We suggest a number of other typologies, categories and frameworks, for instance for skills in relation to social capital (see pp. 44-46). This is a deliberate part of building analytical capacity in the field, and we hope to see at least some of them taken up, utilised and critiqued.

12.1.1 Policy conclusion 1

The *sustaining effect* of education on personal lives and the social fabric demands much fuller recognition. Education transforms people's lives, but it also, less spectacularly, enables them to cope with the multifarious stresses of daily life as well as continuous and discontinuous social change; and to contribute to others' well-being by maintaining community and collective life. This sustaining effect is particularly significant in underpinning rationales for more intersectoral policy-making, especially between education and health.

12.2 Initial education and lifelong learning

We put forward a number of conclusions relating to people's initial education, whether this was confined to the minimum period of schooling or continued on into further or higher education.

Like other educational institutions, school is a vital socialising force. It often brings together children of different backgrounds, and enables them to understand that there are different perspectives, habits and values. The extent to which this beneficial socialising occurs is variable – not all schools facilitate it – and strengthening it is a major issue for policy.

The connection between enjoying school and achievement is not straightforward. Some people got no qualifications at all, but still appreciated their education. Others were successful in conventional terms, but do not carry a happy memory of education with them. We raise the question whether younger generations, who on average achieve more highly than their elders, will necessarily regard learning as a correspondingly more pleasurable experience. The relationship between a more extensive period of initial education on the one hand, and a system of lifelong learning on the other, needs careful analysis.

Relatedly, the issue of equity, and especially intergenerational equity, emerges strongly. Many older respondents describe how they were excluded from potential benefits because their families could not afford to keep them at school, or in other cases to send them to university. Often the outlay involved was in absolute terms very small, perhaps the price of a uniform. This raises quite fundamental policy questions.

It is heartening to be able to report that good teaching has an enduring effect. This is shown by the number of respondents who had not achieved well at school, but who retained positive memories of individual teachers. These memories, often long stored, eased their re-entry into education.

12.2.1 Policy conclusion 2

Guidance for young people, e.g. through Connexions, should stress that even if they choose not to continue directly with their education they should always be conscious that there are opportunities to return to learning.

12.2.2 Policy conclusion 3

Our findings confirm the well-known importance of *non-accredited and local* courses as often the first route for those with low confidence, whether or not they have been successful in initial education.

12.2.3 Policy conclusion 4

Good teaching matters, though its effect may not show up until much later. Teachers at all levels need support in sustaining learning cultures within different student peer groups. Central to this is *adequate time for teachers to do the appropriate job*, especially in relation to learners at the foot of the ladder, who require close personal support.

12.3 Family lives

We describe a number of ways in which adults' involvement in learning has broadly beneficial effects on the lives of their families.

Parents are brought to value their own children's learning more highly, to understand what their children are engaged in at school and to support them in it. This is predictable, yet none the less important, and it offers strong support to current policy commitments on family learning.

As learners themselves, adults act as role models for their children. Reciprocally, children of different ages can help their parents learn, with beneficial effects on relationships. But the effects go further. Families are highly diverse bundles of relationships, and often multigenerational. Learning helps grandparents stay in touch with younger generations, and to play an active part in family life.

The ability to participate in family life, as more broadly in social and economic life, is a key component of what Amartya Sen (1999) calls 'capability'. It may come directly from the content of the learning, or through the self-confidence that learning brings. It operates in different directions, for example enabling adult children to communicate better with their parents. Learning enhances the quality of all kinds of relationships – horizontal as well as vertical.

We should, however, note that learning can generate friction within families, and lead to effects that are, at least from the perspective of some participants, negative. The transformative effect leads to changes of role or values, and this may go against the interests of some of the learner's family members. If education is a modernising force, it brings with it some of the costs of modernisation also. A general conclusion from our work is that both the benefits and the costs of learning are felt by more than the learners themselves, and the same learning may have both a positive and a negative impact.

12.3.1 Policy conclusion 5

Family learning involves more than generating parental involvement in their children's education, though this is a central element. Many different sets of relationships are potentially affected, within and across generations; in every case, learning can play a significant role in sustaining and strengthening these relationships, notably by improving communication skills and mutual respect. More support for initiatives and policies that promote family members learning together in a variety of ways will have multiple benefits, for educational achievement and more widely for family relationships.

12.4 Health

Probably the most powerful manifestation of our case that education plays a sustaining role was in relation to health, and especially to mental health and psychological well-being. This introduces again the pervasive theme of self-esteem, so central to well-being and competence. Learning keeps at bay resignation from an active life and dependency.

It may do this by pre-empting decline into ill health, or by enabling or supporting recovery. Whether its effect is preventative or recuperative, this effect is vitally important, socially and economically. By sustaining people in a degree of personal autonomy, learning prevents them from losing their capability and from becoming a burden on their families or the wider community. This may be a rather functionalist way of expressing the benefit, but its intrinsic value is surely obvious.

We argue that these effects require appropriate analysis that can feed directly into policy, especially at a time when health is so far up the policy agenda. Ironically, the effectiveness of learning as part of health policy may be ignored because of the priority given directly to the health sector. There is great scope for a genuinely intersectoral approach here.

The quality of relationships between health consumers and professionals is also affected. Education, especially but by no means only ESOL, enables people to communicate better with doctors, nurses and other professionals, so that they can articulate their needs and understand the services delivered to them. This is a major efficiency factor.

Finally, learning helps health and well-being by providing people with a sense of purpose. The horizons may be long or short, the aspirations high or low, realistic or not. What matters is that learning helps people to formulate goals, and have a sense that they have a chance to control their own lives.

12.4.1 Policy conclusion 6

Education can have a large effect on *ill health*, especially mental health. In addition to specific measures designed to improve ill health, education has a major sustaining or *preventative role*, which deserves far greater support.

12.4.2 Policy conclusion 7

There is much scope for exploring cost-effective learning-based provision with positive health impacts. Initiatives such as Prescriptions for Learning point the way to creative collaboration between education and health services. This may *require new or refined methodologies to compare the impact of learning on health* with that of clinical or other professional health services.

12.5 Social capital and social cohesion

Learning promotes social capital of different kinds. We identify a number of skills that help civic engagement. These range from meta-competences, which enable people to understand the system and networks within which they operate, through generic competences that help them to function effectively in civic roles, to basic skills that are a necessary condition of participation at any level.

Networks are a basic component of social capital. Learning helps people develop and maintain networks in ways that may be unavailable otherwise. It brings them to a common place, and even where the content of the learning is technical it places them in a position where communication and even friendship are possible. This is fundamental, but its obviousness should not diminish its importance. Learning also enables people to reanimate dormant networks, or to disengage and move on.

Social capital is not all about formal modes of civic engagement. Men and women tend to vary in the mode of engagement, with women manifesting less formal modes, often to do with neighbours and daily transactions, while men take part more in representative modes. We make no value judgement on these different modes; but the link between learning and participation is strong.

Learning helps people acquire, maintain or change their sense of identity. This is linked to the point about goals and horizons made above in relation to health, but it extends to their notions of belonging, to citizenship and to values. To re-invoke the matrix described above, these can be personal or collective, sustaining or transformative (and various permutations of these).

Running through all this is the way learning enables people to develop or modify their values, in a way that characterises a liberal society on any definition. It gives people a chance to understand others' perspectives and values. This may or may not cause them to change their own, but it helps dispel blind prejudice and promotes social communication at many different levels.

12.5.1 Policy conclusion 8

The virtuous cycle of *learning and volunteering* can be fostered in a number of ways. Certain stages in the life cycle are particular appropriate for offering opportunities for people to engage in voluntary activity: for example, parents of young children through their primary school, especially in relation to school-related roles such as classroom assistant; or older people preparing for retirement and after retirement. Retirees are a vast, largely untapped resource for civic roles and responsibilities, and learning can be the trigger to mobilise them.

12.5.2 Policy conclusion 9

The dynamic of participation in civic or community activity means that it generates further learning needs; it also offers people the opportunity to gain skills and confidence that can open up other avenues. Community development and neighbourhood renewal *initiatives could include clear links to educational progression* routes.

12.6 Communication

Learning is of fundamental importance in sustaining and improving *communication* at every level and in every form, from basic and linguistic to advanced and social. Policies and provision should address the development of appropriate and effective communication competences in many different contexts: within schools and colleges; between professionals and consumers in the public services; within families; and between different age groups. Provision here refers not only to courses and formal learning opportunities, but to the physical structures and social contexts within which communication takes place.

12.6.1 Policy conclusion 10

One specific aspect of communications is the importance of ESOL. *Knowing English* is fundamental to the social integration of migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, and can transform their lives.

12.6.2 Policy conclusion 11

Access to *computer skills* is an excellent way of encouraging people from very varying backgrounds to take part in organised learning. Often the outcomes go well beyond the individual skills, and involve unforeseen personal and social benefits.

12.6.3 Policy conclusion 12

Colleges and other educational institutions are places where people can feel part of a community, participating in a learning culture. This includes those who have been on the margins. The institutions need support in developing this function, in the mission they have and the facilities they provide. *Improving the design and quality of education's physical environment* should be a high priority.

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Appendix 1: Respondents' background characteristics

		Frequencies		
Background characteristic	**Value**	**Social Cohesion project**	**Transitions/ Adaptation project**	**Total across projects**
Gender	Female	54	48	102
	Male	34	9	43
Ethnic group	White British	56	34	90
	White other	15	7	22
	Black African	4	5	9
	Black Caribbean	4	1	5
	Black British	3	1	4
	Mixed race	2	none	2
	Indian	1	1	2
	Pakistani	2	2	4
	Bangladeshi	1	2	3
	Asian other	none	4	4
Age	16 – 19	15	none	15
	20 – 24	5	1	6
	25 – 34	20	20	40
	35 – 50	31	34	65
	51 – 64	10	2	12
	65 plus	6	none	6
Highest qualification[3]	No qualifications	10	5	15
	Level 1	11	3	14
	Level 2	24	16	40
	Level 3	25	15	40
	Level 4 or above	18	18	36
Marital status	Married	32	34	66
	Cohabiting	9	4	13
	Single	36	9	45
	Separated/divorced /widowed	7	8	15
Area of residence	Nottingham	38	22	60
	Camden	28	26	54
	Tendring, Essex	22	9	31

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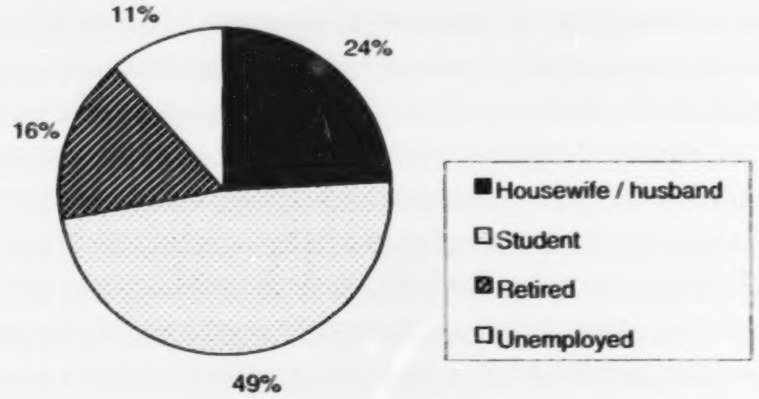
[3] Level 1 – basic skills; Level 2 – 5 GCSEs A–C, NVQ2 and equivalents; Level 3 – 'A' levels, NVQ3 and equivalents; Level 4 – degree and equivalents.

Time commitment to current course	Part-time	64	52	116
	Full-time	24	5	29
Number of children (data available for transitions/adaptation project only)	1	-	16	-
	2	-	17	-
	3	-	12	-
	4 or more	-	12	-
Age of youngest child (data available for transitions/adaptation project only)	Under 4	-	1	-
	4	-	9	-
	5	-	11	-
	6	-	8	-
	7	-	10	-
	8	-	7	-
	9	-	4	-
	10	-	1	-
	11	-	4	-
	Unknown	-	1	-
Totals		88	57	145

Socio-economic characteristics were identified by self-reported labour market status, and for those who were working, social class. Although labour market status is used as an indicator of SES for purposes of describing sample characteristics, non-occupational dimensions of social class such as tenure, access to cultural resources and wealth also emerged through the biographical interviews.

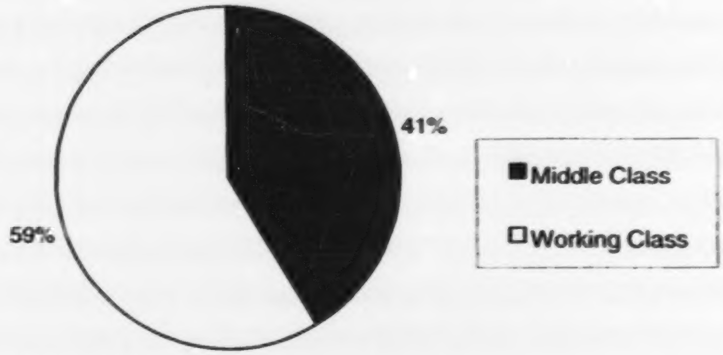
Forty-four per cent of our sample were currently employed. The remaining 56% not in the labour market could be divided into four groups: housewives and househusbands; students; the retired; and the unemployed. Diagram 1 (p. 88) shows the breakdown of the non-labour market group. As can be seen in the diagram, those classifying themselves as students were a large proportion of the non-labour market sample.

Diagram. 1: Sample not in the labour market



Turning to those in the labour market, the Registrar General's socio-economic classification was used to categorise workers as either Middle Class (SES I and II) or Working Class (SES III, IV and V). Diagram 2 shows breakdown by SES for those in the labour market. As can be seen in the diagram, a large proportion (59%) of those sampled were in working-class occupations.

Diagram 2: Sample in the labour market.



The characteristics of the sample as a whole do not necessarily match those of the general population, or even the population of those engaged in lifelong learning as a whole. However, we have succeeded in sampling from a wide variety of individuals whose voices are not necessarily considered in examining the benefits of learning – the unemployed, the retired and working-class learners.

Appendix 2: Information about interview topic guides

Outline of the interview

- Introductions.
- Establishing rapport.
- Learning experiences before the first birth.
- Life story since having children.
- How learning has helped cope with change: summing up.
- Background details.
- Endings.

Notes for the interviewer

- This is a guide to be followed flexibly.
- Ask questions one at a time.
- Avoid asking closed questions.
- Ensure that you have paper and a pen if you think that you will want to use them.
- The whole interview should last for about one and a half hours.
- The heart of the interview is sections 3, 4 and 5.
- Instructions for the use of Card 1 are in Section 1 of the topic guide.
- The respondent completes the short questionnaire in Appendix 2 at the end of the interview.
- The interviewer should familiarise him/herself with the NALS definition of learning in Appendix 1 before the interview.

Key Objectives

To understand how previous and more recent learning has helped and/or hindered the respondent in coping with change during the period between having children and the current time.

This includes:

- what it is about learning that is helpful and/or unhelpful;
- comparisons between the effects of learning and other activities; and
- comparisons between the effects of learning and other things that have affected how the respondent has coped with changes.

Appendix 3: NALS definition of learning activities[4]

Taught learning:

- Any taught courses leading to a qualification, whether or not the qualification was obtained,
- Any taught course designed to help develop skills which might be used in a job.
- Any course, instruction or tuition in driving, playing a musical instrument, in an art or craft, in a sport or in any practical skill,
- Evening classes,
- Learning which involves working alone from a package of materials provided by an employer, college, commercial organisation or other training provider,
- Any other taught course, instruction or tuition.

Non-taught learning:

- Studying for a qualification without taking part in a taught course,
- Supervised training while actually doing a job (i.e., when a manager or experienced colleague has spent time helping a person learn or develop skills as specific tasks are done at work),
- Time spent keeping up to date with developments in the type of work done without taking part in a taught course,
- Deliberately trying to improve knowledge about anything or teach yourself a skill without taking part in a taught course.

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[4] This definition of learning is taken from Beinart & Smith (1998, p. 33).

WIDER BENEFITS OF LEARNING RESEARCH REPORT NO.3

Learning, Continuity and Change in Adult Life

This report presents results from extensive fieldwork carried out by the Wider Benefits of Learning research team. It presents an original analytical framework developed specifically for this study, combined with empirical results from 140 in-depth biographical interviews in three different areas of England. The interviews explore the way learning affects people's health and well-being; their family lives; and their engagement in civic activity. The report addresses these effects at both an individual and collective level. It concludes with a set of significant policy implications.

Professor Tom Schuller is the Dean of the Faculty of Continuing Education at Birkbeck College and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning

Andy Green is Professor of Education in the School of Lifelong Education and International Development, Institute of Education and Co-Director of the Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning

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